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Erica's Divorce.

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AN old weather-beaten, grey village church, with a graveyard around it full of roughly hewn stones, engraved with the quaintest of epitaphs.

Inside, worm-eaten, high-backed pews and other signs of decay and neglect, partly hidden under a profusion of flowers—homely blossoms enough, from the meadows and cottage gardens, arranged perhaps inartistically, but in a fashion that seemed in keeping with the low roof and heavy stone pillars of the old church.

At the altar the sweetest flower of all, Erica Leicester, slim, girlish, and lovely in her simple bridal dress, and by her side her bridegroom, Morton Yardley, tall, strong, and handsome, of the type of masculine beauty that would have befitted a gladiator.

"To love, honour and cherish"—he spoke the well-known words firmly and looked down triumphantly at his young bride; their eyes met—hers with a world of loving shyness in their soft depths.

She fancied him the ideal of her romantic fancies, the true knight of whom she had dreamed among the curious old clipped yew trees of her guardian's sombre garden, and she smiled, half frightened but proudly, on the village folk, who showered rose leaves on her like scented pink and white snow as she left the church and walked by her newly made husband's side to the little wicket gate, followed by many a blessing and loud cheers, for she had lived in that quiet spot since as an orphan of three years old she came to the gloomy old hall, where she had no playmate but a kitten, and was reared by an austere housekeeper who was some kin to the squire, and an eccentric man aged before his time by disappointments and losses.

Her one change in all the past years had been a few terms spent at an exclusive and strict school, which, however, seemed gay by contrast with her home; for at least her companions were

young, and the most narrow-minded, severe schoolmistress cannot entirely suppress the life and spirits of her charges.

Then came the sad hour of parting from her schoolmates to return to the house where laughter was unknown and no one spoke except when necessary. Summer and winter passed, bringing no change, and the gay, bright spirit of the lovely girl might have been crushed but for her homely village neighbours, whose simple joys and sorrows Erica threw her heart into, as her only interest in life. Till one never-to-be-forgotten day Morton Yardley came on some matter of business with regard to an old title-deed, and finding this unexpected inmate at the hall, fell in love at first sight with her, as she stood, long-limbed and graceful, reaching up to restore a little unfledged bird to its nest in a mossy apple tree, and eagerly pressing his suit was married to her before their acquaintance was six weeks old.

A month later Erica sat with her husband in the cool depths of a wide balcony, heavily garlanded with passion flowers and other creepers. Before them stretched the dark blue sea, across which the moon was making a broad, gleaming path. In the sloping thickets of the garden the nightingale's high, sweet notes rang out from the orange trees and daturas, and far below in the town long festoons of crimson, blue, and orange lights were blazing. Sometimes a sheaf of rockets showered bright sparks as they flew into the air, and every now and then there was a gay burst of music, for a great ship had been launched and there were rejoicings, illuminations, and a great ball, to which Erica and her husband were going when they could find it in their hearts to put an end to this sweet hour of happy dreaming.

Morton lay idly on a couch, and Erica, luxuriously ensconced on a pile of cushions, rested her head on his shoulder, so that his passionately fond words could be whispered low, and his hand might tenderly stroke back her rich silky hair.

Presently, however, the exigencies of dress made it necessary for Erica to go, with a sigh for the disturbing of their solitude; but later she returned, radiant with childish delight in her first ball dress, the exquisite triumph of a first-rate artiste, which set off her loveliness to such an extent that even Morton could hardly believe it possible that a few folds of shimmering satin and cloudy lace and some gleaming jewels should transform a beautiful child into a queenly woman.

Erica was the most attractive of all the beauties of various nationalities at the ball; she received quite an ovation, and Morton, as he critically noted her graceful manner and self-possession, inwardly marvelled that a girl reared as she had been should have caught the trick of the world hitherto unknown so aptly. "*On chasse de race*," he thought, and being of those who admire what others do, was accordingly delighted with his bride.

Three years from the date of that delightful first ball Erica Yardley, just arrived at legal womanhood, was lovelier even than in those first days of happiness; but alas for the changed outlook.

It was the old, old, sad story, Morton's passion had cooled never to revive again.

Perhaps the man's nature was fickle and he could not help it, but there was, unluckily, a brutal substratum in it, and when the shortlived love dream was over he spared his sensitive young wife in no way. Harsh words and open neglect succeeded the caresses and adoration which had been her hourly portion. He openly became a slave to other women, and she was forced to tolerate it lest the world should speak of these enchantresses too severely.

One child had been born of the marriage, a delicate, fragile little girl, on which Erica lavished all the love of her nature, but it lived only for a short time, dying while its mother was at a ball, to which she had been forced to go, because her absence might have been construed into a slight to the hostess, just then the latest object of Morton's admiration.

Though unbeloved by her husband, Erica was still fascinating to all other men, and many would gladly have enrolled themselves as her cavaliers. Her unprotected position was so painfully obvious that it roused the chivalrous instincts of some and the baser feelings of others. But though Morton cared so little for her he could be as jealous and suspicious as if she were the idol of his heart. When the poor girl's youth at rare intervals asserted itself, and she enjoyed herself like others, however harmlessly, the fleeting pleasure was paid for, and bitter taunts and unbridled passionate abuse were her portion.

Erica Yardley was no Griselda to bear all uncomplainingly, but she was singularly alone in the world, with no near relatives, and her old guardian had been paralyzed and was in his dotage.

Morton had taken care to keep her quite ignorant of business matters, and controlled her fortune, which would have been

enough to live on, and he was calculating enough never to pass the boundaries allowed by an indulgent world to a man of fashion with plenty to spend in entertaining, so, even had the unhappy wife thought of a divorce, there were no grounds for getting one.

Morton had never struck her; she was not deserted, for she shared his home; she could not even prove him unfaithful, and he spoke of her in affectionate terms to all the Mrs. Grundys of his acquaintance, who would, he knew, run about and say, "Poor Mr. Yardley! it is *so* sad for him that his wife should be so odd. He told me, quite in confidence, you know—I would not dream of telling any one but you—but there is a strain of—well—melancholia in her family, and he is very anxious."

Poor Erica! one half of the women she knew believed her tainted with insanity, and the others, who were more keen-sighted and laughed at Morton's clever invention, scorned the girl who outshone them all in personal charms, yet could not keep one man true to her, because she had loved him too well and let him know it.

The overstrained bow gives way at last, the most timid creature can be brought to bay—and there was good fighting blood in Erica's veins; she came of a line that had given brave soldiers and sailors to the country for many generations. Tortured past endurance, she began to answer Morton's taunts and to defy him, enraging him almost to madness; but still he plumed himself on her helplessness, and believed that she was at his mercy, for he took care that no man of his acquaintance should be intimate at his house. They were spending the summer in Sorrento, and their villa had a long winding path down to the sea. Morton kept a boat, in which Erica had to go out when he wished her to play hostess to his lady friends, or was left to pass the long hours as best she could at home if he found her superfluous. The hours, once so tedious, began to be all too short. Not long after they settled down at Bella Vista the dark shadows vanished from beneath Erica's sweet blue eyes, the thin cheeks rounded, the pretty dimples re-appeared, and her brightness began to return once more. Hope can do so much when one is still young.

Morton might have been suspicious, but was just then wrapped up in his own affairs. A beautiful Italian countess, whom he adored, was visibly transferring her favours elsewhere, and Morton could not outshine his rival.

His servants disliked him, or whispers might have reached him of midnight meetings on the cliff among the thickets of evergreens and cherry trees, and of a white canoe that was often seen gliding over the water just before dawn to a smart little steam yacht which had been cruising about the coast for some time.

The climax came suddenly. Morton, to please the countess, designed a brilliant fête; every whim of hers was consulted, the invitations were dictated by her. Erica had merely to exert herself to the utmost to carry out the details. The most lavish expenditure seemed a trifle to the enamoured Morton, and nothing was spared on the masque, which was a combination of ball and water party, illuminated boats awaiting the guests as a change from dancing.

The clever Italian let her English admirer tax himself to the utmost, and then eluding him, by ingenious change of domino, spent the hours with his rival. Half mad with rage, Morton awaited the supper time, when unmasking would be general, and then it appeared that the hostess was missing, but her husband, whose thoughts were centred elsewhere, took no heed of the fact, though behind fans and in corners the guests were interchanging their ideas.

Their suspicions were not groundless. There had been a strange boat among the little illuminated flotilla which, when the silver trumpets played the call to supper, disappeared unnoticed in the general race to the landing-place, and with extinguished lights stole quickly over the bay to where, nearer Castellamare, the yacht with steam up lay ready to be off at a moment's notice, and before Morton knew that his victim had at length escaped from his clutches, the "Sea Swallow," hull down, was flying across the waves safe from immediate pursuit.

Erica, worn out with excitement and anxiety, lay sleeping soundly as a child below, but the companion of her flight paced the deck scanning the horizon as the dawn flushed sea and sky with rose and pale yellow, and occasionally consulting the captain, who abstained from all comment, though he looked rather self-satisfied, and turned his glass also pretty frequently to the direction from which they had come.

As the morning hours passed by it was very clear that there was no chance of pursuit by sea, and it was hardly probable that there should be. Morton Yardley owned no yacht, and he was

hardly enough liked by his male acquaintance to render it likely that a fully found steam yacht would be at his service for such a purpose, even if it were sure that the fugitive had gone by water; but, truth to state, her flight was shrouded in mystery. The conspirators had confided in no one, and those who really knew anything of the stolen meetings were by no means sure whence had come the stranger, who had never indeed been clearly seen. A great dark cloak and slouched hat had once or twice been visible among the bushes, but the individual thus disguised was known by sight to no one.

So the "Sea Swallow" slipped smoothly over the blue water, and Erica after a while felt thoroughly safe and happy. The change from the old life of slavery to Morton's temper and love of tyranny to quiet and freedom brought relief to her overtried nerves, and leaning back in a great deck chair, she idly watched the rippling waves, the sea birds, or the sailors at their work, feeling incapable of thinking of past or future, and striving to enjoy the hour of sunshiny rest and peace, without even asking whither they were bound.

This could not last long. Erica was too clear-headed and quick to remain in a kind of dreary lethargy, and in a few days showed herself alive to the exigencies of the situation.

"Must I get a divorce?" she asked sadly after listening to her companion's opinions.

"Must you go through the courts, you mean, Erica? Why certainly, the ends of the earth would not hide you from that man otherwise, even though you say now that you will never remarry any one," returned the yacht owner, Cecil Ringwood by name, dark, handsome, and betrayed by a slight accent to be of American origin.

"Would not a separation be enough? the court would be so dreadful," pleaded Erica.

"Why, you little goose," returned Cecil, lighting a cigarette, "of course you need not appear. Do you think that I would submit you to such indignities; that brute cares for nothing but money, and I can afford to pay for my whistle—damages he shall have, and that will console him for your escape."

"If only he had been just a little kind," sobbed Erica with a sudden remembrance of the days long past. "But, Cecil, it was such misery to be slighted, insulted—and my baby might never

have died if I had been with her, but I do feel so wicked in doing what I have done."

"Don't talk rot, my little one," said Cecil curtly. "It's time such men as Mr. Morton Yardley learn that women are not their lawful prey, to be tortured daily as you were. Come, dry up now, and think of the lovely times we'll have together. I just surmise that there will be no place in creation worth seeing besides those we mean to look in at."

A savage man was Morton Yardley when, outwitted by his wife and coolly thrown over by the countess, he found himself in a galling position and exposed to the covert sneers of his acquaintances.

He had felt so confident that Erica was in complete submission, that her flight wounded his pride sorely. The countess was quite beyond the reach of his malevolence, and could laugh at his impotent wrath, so he determined at least to revenge himself on the woman over whom the law gave him power—at least, if he could find her; and apparently Erica was reckless, for she was speedily heard of as staying at a London hotel with Mr. Cecil Ringwood.

Beside himself with rage at their effrontery, Yardley rushed off, fully determined to openly insult and challenge the man who had put such an affront on him; but on reaching the hotel he learnt that he was a day too late; they had gone, leaving only the address of a lawyer in New York, but ample evidence was easily obtained for instituting a divorce, which Yardley pushed on as fast as possible, though he did not even know his rival by sight, and hardly stayed to marvel why Erica, proud, refined, and pure as she had always seemed, should have thrown herself on the protection of a stranger.

Others wondered less; frank, fearless women did not hesitate to declare that she had been goaded past endurance. Men privately exchanged the opinion that Yardley was "a bad egg," but these were in the minority; others openly rejoiced in the tarnishing of her fair name. She was out of the pale of society now, and they could throw a little more dirt on her, for at least they had always kept the eleventh commandment, which is, "Thou shalt not be found out."

An office in a back street in the hottest month of the New York summer is not a tempting place, and the man who occupied it, like his rooms, showed clearly that he had been worsted in the

pursuit of Dame Fortune, for his well-worn clothes matched the poverty-stricken bareness of his surroundings. He was not good-looking, but still in his clear, keen, honest eyes and firm mouth there was something which inspired confidence, and the tall, good figure and well-shaped head gave him a certain look of distinction.

He was reading with close attention a long letter and referring with knitted brow to some legal works as he read.

He did not soliloquize, not being on the stage, but thought as he read the letter, "Who but Cecil could have conceived and carried out such a Quixotic plan? If it becomes known, even over here, it would surely mean social ruin. Would it, though? After all one never can tell what the upper Four Hundred will think, and perhaps the husband would be the one to find society a thorny corner, something like sitting on a porcupine in pyjamas, and Cecil and the lady would no doubt be the lions of the hour—and I should stand the racket—Cecil would pay, but I should lose my profession, and have to go West, or something."

He looked round the dreary office, brushed away half-a-dozen flies which were holding a gymkana on his forehead, opened a window to shut it again in disgust, as the hot air blew in redolent of stale fish and other sickening odours.

"I might afford to risk such a Paradise," he thought bitterly. "Work, brains, honesty have done nothing for me, I will chance it, and agree to Cecil's plans."

Five minutes later John Sewell was aboard a horse-car, bound for a good but quiet hotel, where Erica Yardley and Cecil Ringwood were temporarily located.

The well-furnished parlour and dainty lunch were a pleasant change from the fifth-rate eating-house and tablecloth black with flies, where his mid-day meal was usually devoured. Erica's sweet manner and lovely face appealed to his chivalrous instincts, and by the time that over the coffee and choice cigarettes he had heard from Cecil an account of the long misery of hourly slights and insults that she had undergone, he was enlisted heart and soul in her cause, for whatever an American may be, respect and tenderness for women are ingrained in his nature.

"The mean-spirited skunk, the cowardly 'possum!" he ejaculated. "But say now, Cecil, could not the lady have separated, and not thrown away her character as she has done?"

Cecil recapitulated all the arguments in favour of their present

plan of action, and John Sewell, who thought less of a divorce than an Englishman would do, was silenced if not convinced, partly, perhaps, because he felt that he had no power or business to interfere, and partly because the enormous fee offered was a temptation to a man who had hardly enough food, and knew what it was to live for days on bread and vegetables.

"You are off at once for two or three years, Cecil, as I understand, in your yacht, and I am to act for you. Of course, neither of you appear, and judgment must of course go against you, probably Mr. Yardley will claim compensation; he is the sort of high-souled rattle-snake that will plaster his honour with bank notes. It will be a costly business, I must warn you," added Mr. Sewell rather suggestively.

"Who cares?" replied Cecil defiantly. "I can afford it, Jack, if any one can. Why the good old mine improves daily, and I am rolling up no end of a pile, as well as spending."

The ring of exulting self-satisfaction in the speaker's tones touched John Sewell sharply for a moment with a sense of the contrast. Cecil and he had been playfellows when both were alike poor, the children of English gentlemen who had emigrated to retrieve their fortunes. They had shared their meals, climbed trees, run barefoot in the brooks, and been happy and careless as the squirrels and birds; but one father was clever and fortunate, he had found a rich mine, and by his own hard work and good management died a millionaire; the other, feckless, helpless, unthrifty, went from bad to worse, and John had nothing and no one to help him to make a start in life.

Cecil's quick eyes caught the look on Sewell's face.

"I am a real cur, bragging of money, and you, Jack, my dear, dear old mate, tell me how are you off for it. No, no, don't lie; I know your face too well; you used to look like that when you had no bread and molasses and swore you were not hungry rather than have mine. Tell me the truth, are you doing well?"

"Not too badly for a beginner," replied Mr. Sewell cheerily.

"I shall double the fee that I offered," replied Cecil.

"No, you will not," returned Sewell firmly; "you shall give me that fee, which for the work proposed is not too high—any one else will charge as much—and you may place at my disposal the sum that I calculate will cover everything; that is, if you choose to trust me so far."

"You shall have a blank cheque at once," said Cecil eagerly.

"Nothing of the sort, you will receive a properly drawn out amount, allowing a small margin for accidents, and that sum you will send me, but not one cent more—I shall only return it if you do," said the lawyer quietly.

Cecil looked at him for a moment, then with a shrug of the shoulders said carelessly :

"If you will not take help, it is not my business to force it on you, John, though I would have given it willingly for old sake's sake."

And as John Sewell walked home he thought regretfully that his pride had stood in his way, and he felt half sorry ; but then, recovering his more natural tone of mind, he was glad that he had not taken advantage of a mere generous momentary impulse, and had acted up to his ideas of honesty and honour.

The yacht was many leagues from land, and Mr. Sewell had taken his last instructions a week since, and was awaiting the next move in the game, when he was surprised by a visit from a respectable man, who informed him that his new office was quite ready for occupation.

"Mine?" exclaimed Mr. Sewell ; "this is some mistake."

"Nothing can be plainer," replied the stranger ; "it is taken in your name, rent paid in advance for three years ; if you don't occupy I guess it will stand empty. Here is the letter of instructions."

John tore it open eagerly and read :

"DEAR OLD CHUM,—I have a fancy to own an office, but cannot look after it just now, so trust to your doing so ; don't fail me, but keep it aired.—CECIL."

Without another word John caught up his hat and accompanied the messenger to the address given. The office was admirable in every respect—position, arrangement, and fitting—and on the table lay four letters of introduction to some of the most influential men of the profession, and, better still, two briefs.

Cecil had not forgotten old times, and with almost passionate gratitude in his heart, John vowed that he would not prove himself unworthy.

The evidence of a divorce case is not specially edifying, but as

in Yardley *versus* Yardley and Ringwood no defence was offered, the matter ended quickly, and scandalous folks felt rather defrauded of an anticipated treat.

Morton Yardley pocketed a very substantial sum as damages, and not being of sensitive fibre, spent it on his newest divinity. A provincial mayoress eloped with a costermonger, and this proved so sensational, as she was the daughter of a German baron, that the Yardley case was forgotten even more speedily than usual.

Two yachts lay side by side in the loveliest of tiny harbours, where great palm trees, broad-leafed bananas, and a thicket of flowering shrubs reflected their luxuriant beauty in the still water, and a tangled mass of gorgeous creepers ran from bough to bough and hung down in long garlands, which trailed on the rippling waves beneath.

An ideal paradise where the cares and interests of the world could be forgotten in impossible dreams of a life to be passed in a tropical Eden, by two whose thoughts should never stray to wider horizons, but be for ever concentrated on each other.

Hidden from prying eyes, behind a wealth of leaf and blossom, a tiny boat rocked gently on the baby wavelets of the flowing tide, in it were two, a man and a woman; and the hush of the silent afternoon hour brought only unrest to them both, though the one showed it not at all, and the other only in the quick, jerky fashion in which he rolled cigarettes between his strong, brown fingers.

A very different type of manhood to Morton Yardley, whose good looks even in boyhood showed a certain trace of the nature which in its cruel sensuality had snatched at Erica as a thoughtless lad tears a lovely white lily from its stem, to tire of it and crush it a little later.

Dick Hamilton, younger son of a good old family, bore the stamp of Eton and Oxford training, and had the unmistakeable look of a well-bred Englishman, not specially handsome, perhaps, but still very good to look at, with a kindly smile and eyes and voice that softened when he spoke to a woman or a child.

He had left home to seek his fortune, and being of the lucky ones of the earth, chanced to save the life of a rich man's only child at great risk to himself, and thus got a start in life which enabled him to get on so rapidly that he was already wealthy

enough to keep the yacht which now lay at anchor by the side of Cecil Ringwood's boat; and from the state room of that same "Sea Swallow," the owner, who was supposed by the two under the shady creepers to be passing the hot drowsy hours in a siesta, was vainly endeavouring with eager, jealous eyes to see through into the shady nook that sheltered them.

The pair who were so wrapt in their own visions that all besides seemed a matter of indifference to them, were after all but slightly divided by a fragile screen from the rest of the world, and presently a great blue, velvety butterfly fluttered in and rested on Erica's white forehead.

"Good luck," she said merrily. "So Mammie Dinah who brings the fruit says: 'A butterfly means joy,' and I do so want to be quite happy," she added half to herself with a little sigh, and her soft lips quivered like those of a sorrowful child.

Dick's self-control, previously strained to the very utmost, suddenly gave way, as he saw the sweet eyes fill with unbidden tears.

He threw himself at her feet, forgetting how frail their little boat was, and pouring out words of the most passionate endearment, he covered her slender hands with kisses, imploring her to speak the words that would make him happy, for he loved her, and had loved her since first they met; he had but waited to give her time to know him better; she must know that he loved her fondly, truly; he repeated himself as lovers have done from time immemorial, and will go on doing.

For a moment Erica yielded in silence to his caresses, her eyes met his, her lips parted as if to answer him fondly, and then with an abrupt movement she drew back sharply, repulsing him decidedly.

Startled by the sudden change Dick remained silent, then exclaimed, "Erica, my sweet! my darling! what is it now? have I offended you? surely not in begging you to be my wife!"

"You do me an honour," she replied, in a strange, forced, toneless voice; "but I cannot marry you."

"Why not?" pleaded Dick; "I can give you all that you could ask; I am not poor, and I never asked any other woman to marry me. Erica! Erica! my heart's darling, trust yourself to me."

"I cannot marry you," she reiterated, gravely and quietly.

Dick grew very pale and gazed at her in amazement.

"Erica, you have deceived me," he replied firmly, but gently. "When you consented this afternoon to come here with me, surely you knew why I wanted you all alone."

Erica hesitated, then replied :

"I do not wish to deceive you. I did know—it was best—for you, for—for both of us to have it over ; let it be a secret between us, and row me back, please, to the 'Sea Swallow.'"

"Not yet," returned Hamilton. "You owe me some explanation, Erica, and I will have it too. I do not believe that you dislike me."

Had he looked at the fair face, which was all too expressive, no answer would have been needed, but with eyes fixed on her tightly clasped hands, he went on, "Tell me the truth, Erica, do you not like me?"

"I like you," she said coldly enough, but the slight fingers looking as if in agony betrayed her secret.

"Erica, my darling !" Dick exclaimed with sudden eagerness, "you are keeping back the truth ; as you will answer when all secrets are revealed, do you love me?"

For one instant she tried to lie to him but failed, then rising slowly and gracefully, steadying her tall, slim figure by grasping the creepers, she answered simply, "I do love you, Dick, but I cannot marry you," and without another word she stepped from the boat to the shore, and would have left him, but he sprang after her and snatching her up swung her back into the boat. "My God, child !" he cried, "there is a coral snake, do not be so foolish ; surely to escape from me you need not risk an awful death."

Erica, who had a horror of snakes, trembled violently as she realized her danger, and Dick, taking up the light oars, with a stroke or two ran the boat from under the shadow of the foliage, and though his companion begged in a half-hearted way to be taken back straight to the yacht, he made for the mouth of the harbour, pulling vigorously till they were clear of the little landlocked bay, and out where the evening breeze blew soft and fresh over the blue expanse of ocean.

The sun was sinking in a glorious mass of brilliantly coloured clouds, across which a bar of deepest purple showed in sharp contrast and ominously ; the tall, feathery palms which crowned a small islet stood out intensely green, and the white coralline

strand beneath them was hard and clear as if cut out of alabaster. A flock of screaming gaudy parroquets flew over them, and some native boats rowed by, the dark-skinned, grinning oarsmen and girls chattering, gesticulating, and holding up strange fish and fruit which they wanted to sell.

The unfamiliar scene gave Erica a strange feeling of unreality, though the minutest details were unconsciously printed on her brain, to haunt her when Dick's eager voice no longer sounded in her ears, like part of the dream in which she seemed to herself a passive spectator, not a woman to whom a man was pleading for his life's happiness; all that she felt clear about was that at any cost she must reiterate her negative, to no other form of words could she trust herself, and in dull, monotonous tones she continued to repeat, "I cannot, cannot marry you, Dick," feeling all the time that her strength ebbed with the words, and the darkness as of night was closing on them both.

At last, like a scared child longing for home in a strange place, she began to cry silently and piteously, till Dick, moved by her white tear-stained cheeks, suddenly laid a tender, kindly hand on her trembling ones, saying, "My poor little girl, don't, don't cry like that, you are overdone, dear; I will row you back at once, and when you are rested to-morrow you shall tell me all about it. Trust me, darling, I will not say a word now to worry you."

He took up his oars, and rowed on silently and steadily, only pausing once to buy some lovely fragrant white flowers from an old woman's canoe, with which he filled Erica's lap.

They soon reached the yacht, and with a tender, firm pressure of her hand he helped her on board, and left her.

Erica hastily went below and with the usual feminine impulse made straight for her little state room, there to fling herself down on her berth, and give way to a storm of sobs which shook her from head to foot, and which she did her best to stifle by burying her face on the pillow. She did not hear the door open, but presently was pulled up by no gentle touch from the pillow, and found herself confronted by Cecil Ringwood, whose lips were set and eyes flashing with anger.

"What is all this, Erica? But I need not ask," said Cecil sternly. "In spite of all warnings you have let Dick Hamilton make love to you, and now like a baby you are crying for the

moon. Pray, have you broken your word, and explained matters to him? May I ask?"

"Of course, not," replied Erica, with momentary indignation, "But oh, Cecil, Cecil, I am so miserable, you might be kind to me."

"Kind!" retorted Cecil bitterly, "I should not think there are many who would have done for you all that I have, and now you call me unkind!"

Erica began to sob again and said meekly, "Do forgive me, Cecil—I know—I know, dear, how good you have been—and all—but what was I to do? Dick loves me—he is coming for my answer to-morrow—he would not take a refusal, and—and——"

"And I may go to the wall, Erica. I have served my turn, and am of no more use to you," returned Cecil; "cast aside for a lover whom you have known so short a time; so be it."

The bitter words told of sharp pain and a proud, disappointed spirit which would not bend at any cost. Both Cecil and Erica were utterly miserable and did not understand each other, but Erica's was the more yielding nature.

"Only tell me what to do," she said; "my brain seems stupefied and I cannot think any more."

"You have not thought to much purpose at all, it seems to me," retorted Cecil sharply; "what I see you want me to say is, Go to Dick's arms, regardless of consequences, to—any one. What I do say is, that if you have any sense of right and wrong, if you really care for that man or for me, you will cut through the tangle that cannot be unravelled, and go."

"Go! where to?" said Erica, sitting up and looking bewildered.

"There is a mail steamer to be caught at a port thirty miles away to-morrow. The launch would get you to her in less than four hours," replied Cecil quietly.

Erica looked straight into her companion's eyes for a few moments, then, as if a sudden light had broken on her, she said, very simply, but firmly:

"I will go, since you think it best."

Her unexpected capitulation so touched Cecil that the latter almost persuaded Erica to stay, or suggested that they would both go, but at that instant the steward knocked with some message and the yielding moment passed.

The necessary arrangements for the launch were made, and

just as Dick Hamilton, after a night of feverish restlessness, fell into a sound morning sleep, the smart little launch was alongside, and Erica, hastily descending the gangway, stepped on to her, and was far away before Dick awoke, to commence a new chapter in her troubled life.

* * * * *

The gay strains of a glorious band were ringing out a seductive waltz, and a brilliantly dressed company, all carefully masked, swung lightly over the polished floor to its strains.

A grand masquerade was in progress, given by the governor of one of our small islands in honour of some dignity or another; outside in the tropical darkness the gardens were gay with lamps which quite put the fireflies in the shade.

A tall, well-built man, who had been waltzing incessantly with a slender girl in Spanish dress, paused near an open window, then with a word to his partner, went out of the hot ball-room into the cooler scented night.

"How perfectly you waltz!" he said to the girl, whose dark flashing eyes and dainty little chin were alone visible.

"Your voice seems familiar, too."

"Perhaps it is," replied the lady. "You are too constant to one, though, to think much of others."

Her companion started a little.

"What do you know of me?" he asked hastily.

"I know that you are wasting your life in a vain dream. You will never wed the one you sigh for," said the girl quietly.

"Why not?" cried the man eagerly. "Where is she? For God's sake, tell me, if you know. She left me without a word, but——"

"But perhaps she could not speak that word. How was she living when you knew her? Her husband is not dead. Did she tell you nothing of her past life?" asked the Spaniard. "Yours is a good old name, Mr. Hamilton. Will you risk all for love—even a stain on it?"

A cold, strange dread kept Dick silent for a moment; his companion carelessly turned away to smell some fragrant jasmine blossoms, but, recovering himself, Dick seized her slender wrists. "You drive me mad!" he exclaimed. "Where is she? I will know."

"If I knew, possibly I might tell you, but I do not, so you need

not break my wrists," replied his partner. "Are there no other beautiful, faithful women in the world with a past on which no shadow of a doubt rests?"

"Not for me," said Dick. "At least not till I have seen her again, and made sure that all hope is over."

"Oh, miracle of manhood!" laughed the slim Spaniard saucily. "What constancy! And is she another paragon of all charms and virtues?"

"But you know her?" said Dick in a doubtful voice.

The girl's laughter rang out mockingly:

"Oh, Solomon! I heard some vague rumours, and you have told me the rest. No, don't be angry, life is so short, so sad; let us be happy, and dance while we may. Will you not ask me? Too much offended—Ah, just one little turn to make friends."

The seductive voice, with its varying sweet intonations, was irresistible. Dick might love one woman, but he was young still, and could feel the attractions of another as *piquante* as his unknown partner. In another moment they were gliding together in that seductive harmony peculiar to two perfect dancers whose steps suit. After all, life is short, let us gather its roses; and as the night went on the reaction from a long spell of uncertainty, pain, and doubt began to inspire Dick, his voice softened, and he began to think with regret of the parting.

Unmasking was not *de rigueur*, and his companion retained her little black velvet disguise. She might have had scores of partners, but, apparently careless of public opinion, gave Dick all the waltzes till the rooms began to thin, and then she bade him find her carriage.

"May I not see you to-morrow?" he whispered, as they parted lingeringly, and with a slight accent of triumph she gave the required permission.

Dick fancied himself not of an inconstant temper, and in very truth he still loved Erica, but before a fortnight was out the lovely heroine of the masquerade had cast her chains about him, and he was unconsciously drifting down the stream as she willed. He knew now that they had met before; he had not been attracted then, but now her undercurrent of suggestion gradually insinuated the thought that he was after all a fool to pursue a will-o'-the-wisp when at hand was a creature of flesh and blood, clever, brilliant, handsome, and well inclined to listen if he

wooded. She was rich too and independent, so his money was no attraction to her, and her duenna, being a somewhat deaf old lady of good position, never interfered in the smallest degree with her high-spirited guest's arrangements—she settled everything to please herself.

So Dick went early and stayed late, enjoying to the full the delicious privileges of what he fancied a platonic friendship, till one day his eyes were opened by the sudden announcement that his charming friend was going away, and as she told him this in their favourite seat under a great shady palm, with her pretty head very near to him, he turned suddenly, and printing a dozen kisses on the rich tempting lips, exclaimed :

“ My darling, stay with me ! Be my wife ! ”

“ Do you love me ? ” she whispered softly. “ Better than you loved her—or at least as well ? ”

Dick hesitated. Even in that moment he could not lie, and said gently :

“ My love for you is different, my sweet one ; you are a very sorceress. Give yourself to me, dearest, and I swear that you shall never regret it. I shall be your slave for life.”

And though the words were accompanied by kisses, his betrothed sighed even as she held up her face to him, for in her passionate, jealous heart she felt that her rival had triumphed, and was better loved than ever she could be, and she longed above all things to be his dearest, the one woman in all the world to him.

But still he was a charming and attentive lover, and she could find no fault with him, for in public he was so courteous and attentive, in private he showed her so much affection, that a more easily contented woman would have thought him one of a thousand and deemed herself a fortunate being ; but this girl had too keen perceptions, and was too passionately fond of him not to detect that the gold did not ring true though he honestly believed that it did.

The Dead Sea fruit was turning to ashes on her lips, but still she could not by her own act drive him from her, and perhaps she fancied that in time her devotion must win a full, free return from the man she held so dear.

There was no need to delay the marriage long ; the extent of her wealth startled Dick, who had enough of his own, however, to prove him no mercenary fortune-hunter.

The settlements were drawn up in liberal fashion, though Dick would not allow his betrothed to shower gold on him recklessly, and engaged her lawyer, a grave, sensible young man, to uphold him in this determination.

The days flew, and when under the glamour of his future wife's bewitching ways, and the loveliness which she knew so well how to set off, Dick gave himself up to the seductive influence, and believed that he loved her to distraction, but when he was alone or in the darkness of the night, a sudden conviction would come to him that he was but the slave of passion, and that all that was truest and best in his nature was only to be roused by the tall, fair, sad-eyed woman to whom he had given his first and real love far away among the isles of the Pacific.

He tried to steel himself, but in vain, by believing her a frail creature whose unfaithfulness had caused her husband to cast her off, but the sweet, piteous eyes haunted him, and he felt that no sin of hers could have parted them had she willed it otherwise ; but she had left him heartlessly, cruelly, he said to himself, and now another woman, whose truth and purity he could not doubt, had staked her happiness on his love, and he would prove himself grateful for so rare a gift. And there, as a sort of salve to his conscience, he ended generally by going out and buying jewels to lavish on her, and she loved the gifts for the giver's sake.

The wedding was to be a very quiet one, neither Hamilton nor his bride elect had any intimate friends in the colony, to which both had drifted rather by chance than otherwise, but for even the simplest of marriages some little preparations are necessary ; and for a day or two before the eventful one, Dick found himself rather in the way than otherwise when he went to see his *fiancée*, so he frequented the club a great deal more than usual, and was turning over the papers when he heard a familiar name mentioned as one man said to another.

"So Yardley's dead ; you remember him—owned Golden Rain you know—a good mare she is too. Smithson gave £900 for her and brought her over here."

"Yardley, Morton Yardley ?" said the other man, who was an Englishman visiting the colony. "Yes, I knew him—bad lot—never liked the fellow—he had a very pretty wife, but she bolted. No one pitied Yardley, he treated her badly."

"Well," said the first speaker, "he's dead now, dog-cart accident—always drove wild brutes. There is a paragraph about him and his history in *Verity*, or one of those papers—come and have a drink."

They sauntered out, and Dick went to the table and looked for the paper in question. Erica was nothing to him now, he thought, but he would just see what was said. Would she care for this man's death, he wondered. He soon found what he wanted, and began to read leisurely; but suddenly, with an exclamation of surprise, he sprang up as if shot, and stood wildly gazing at the paper as if unable to believe his eyes; then, crushing his hat on, hastily he tore out of the club, past the astonished porter and several loungers, who stared blankly, and calling up his dog-cart, drove off at racing pace, heedless of appearances, to the pretty house on the outskirts, where his arrival was usually so welcome.

This time he came in no lover-like mood, but striding in to the rooms without any greeting, put the paper into the hands of the girl who had run in joyously to meet him, and pointing out the paragraph that had so moved him said sternly:

"If I am not mad, and dreaming that these facts are stated, what explanation do you give? Is there another Cecil Ringwood, or what does this extraordinary statement mean? 'Mr. Morton Yardley was married to Erica, only daughter of Major Leicester of the Engineers, but divorced her when she left him for Mr. Cecil Ringwood of New York.'"

"It is a mistake," faltered the girl. "At least—oh, Dick, don't look at me so angrily. What does this paper matter? You say they are all lies, these stupid society things."

With a quick little movement she was beside him twining her arms about him, but he put her from him saying, "By the heaven above us, Cecil, I will have the truth from your lips; I am beginning to see that I have been fooled; take care, I am desperate, half-mad with the uncertainty as to who is true and who is false. With whom did Erica Yardley leave her home? Answer me."

There was a dead silence only broken by a gasping sob from the girl, who stood like a deer at bay.

Dick marched to the window and took up a field glass from the table.

"I see," he said coolly, "that the steamer starts for England in an hour or so by the signals, I shall go by her and unravel this cursed plot."

Without another word he was going, but Cecil sprang forward and laid her hand on his arm.

"You may spare yourself the trouble. I and I, perhaps, alone can tell you all. Erica and I were schoolfellows, and the dearest friends. She married a man who proved a brute and a black-guard. I guessed the law was all on his side, so I just stole that poor child out of his clutches. Well, then, it seemed that in your straitlaced old country she could only be freed by seeming core bad. The good women must lay themselves out to suffer. So I dressed as a man and took her to a London hotel; and, as I surmised, Yardley made little investigation. He sucked down the dollars like a greedy fish. He could have pricked the bubble easily had he cared to do so. And my lawyer, John Sewell, managed the rest. When you met us yachting together it was all blown over and forgotten."

"And why, in heaven's name, could you not tell me this at first, instead of letting me believe that poor innocent girl a deservedly cast-off wife?" said Dick harshly. "And where is she now?"

"I do not know," said Cecil sullenly; "she was in England." Then, after a pause, the strain proved too much for her, and she burst into bitter weeping, sobbing out:

"Oh, Dick, Dick! why are you so hard on me? I loved you so from the first, and you could not have married her. She was not really divorced, you know; and I thought if she went it was best for her, and that you would love me in time. But I see now that you never cared for me, and oh! you can go to her; don't waste time!"

Poor Dick was sorely perplexed by Cecil's extraordinary confession. He could not be indifferent to the girl who was to have been his bride so soon, and was so loving and so lovely; but for all that he knew that he was wildly happy to feel that nothing now need part him from Erica, his own love—his pearl of women.

He stood hesitating, bewildered, not knowing what to say or do; but Cecil's mood changed suddenly. Springing up from the sofa that she had thrown herself on in her outburst of sorrow, she swept by him and rang the bell sharply. The servant came promptly, and in sharp commanding tones Cecil said, "Order Mr. Hamilton's dog-cart at once; and you will not admit him again." Then, as the astonished servant stood aghast, she stamped her

foot, saying, "Go directly ; what are you waiting for ?" Then, with a laugh that was sadder than tears, she said to Hamilton : "I guess the best woman in the world could not have fixed it off neater for you, Dick ! Good-bye." Her voice quavered on the last word, but the dog-cart was announced, and with an imperial gesture she rejected his hand. The eager servant felt sure that they had quarrelled, and flew off to spread the news ; and Hamilton, deeply grateful to be gone, yet thought sadly of the girl who had loved him so well, and he remembered her till he reached London, and wondered how to find Erica Yardley without a clue. Being a man of sense as well as action, he went to Mr. Yardley's lawyers, and one of them, an elderly man, suggested that at her own old home something would be known. "There is always an old nurse or some such body," he added.

Dick Hamilton, too restless to wait, determined to go himself ; and driving from the nearest station about seven miles off, found himself landed at a primitive inn, where he supposed some diplomacy might be required to lead up to the subject of his search. So he ordered dinner, and went for a stroll in the little street. Passing through the old churchyard, he wandered on, careless of his road, so engrossed was he in his thoughts, when suddenly he came to a little gate with a neatly cut hedge on either side, framing a tiny garden and a small cottage wreathed with flowers, and sitting on the grass plot, with a book in her hand, under a great fuchsia bush, was Erica.

The landlady of the Green Dragon wasted much time and trouble over the plump chicken destined for Mr. Hamilton's refreshment, for he did not reappear till four hours after he was due ; but when the good-hearted but irascible dame found out what had delayed him he was freely pardoned ; for Erica had a staunch friend in the sturdy, good woman, who, through good and evil report, had always been faithful to the girl whom she had nursed as a wee toddler still crying for her dead mother and that bright home so different to the dark, dreary hall.

* * * *

Once again Cecil Ringwood sat facing Mr. Sewell, but his office was now as comfortable as any man could desire. He had made good use of the start put in his way by Cecil, and talent, work, and mother wit did the rest. He was now a rising man in good position, and earning a handsome income.

A long hour's work was concluded, for Cecil's property entailed a great deal of correspondence, and it was not very often that he could make her give steady attention to her business matters, but at last the papers were locked up and the lawyer said, "And now, Cecil, am I to congratulate you on being selected as the future Duchesse de Paramé?"

"No," returned Cecil coldly. "No amount of French polish seems just what I want to get in exchange for the cost of silver-plating that young man's coronet. I guess I am not so ugly but a little affection might be thrown in, and he offered none."

"Many men have loved you, Cecil; you are hard to please," said John.

"That is so, perhaps," she answered carelessly. "John, I wish you and I were back in the old clearing where the striped squirrels ran about. Life was better somehow then. Do you remember the huckleberry jam and the doughnuts? and the fun we had at apple bees and hay frolics?" She did not look at Sewell as she chattered on about the past, but suddenly his composure gave way.

"Cecil!" he said hastily, "don't go on so, don't, child. I can't stand it. We are not children now. I am just your man of business, and—and— Oh! my darling, I must tell you just once. I have loved you all my life, since you were a darling bare-legged baby." He tried hard to speak the last words jestingly, but the pain was too sharp. He choked over it, and had to stop for a minute, then went on, "Don't worry, dear, do not think of it again. I never meant to tell you; forget it, and think of me only as your useful servant, who is always ready to do your bidding."

"Well," said Cecil gravely, "you can begin to draw up some more settlements. I am thinking of getting married before long."

"Yes," replied John bravely, in business-like tones, "shall I take your instructions now? Do I know the happy man?"

"Possibly; at any rate you may judge for yourself—here, catch," and Cecil threw a tiny silver case to him.

John opened it, and started up eagerly, the little mirror within showing him his own likeness.

"Cecil! Cecil! My darling, darling girl. Oh! do not deceive me even in play. I could go on as I was, but you do not know one quarter of my love for you. Is it really true?"

And for all answer the girl that he had loved so long and so

hopelessly, as he thought, let him fold her in his arms, and her restless, unsatisfied craving for love was stilled once and for ever by her old playmate's passionate tender devotion.

In one of the loveliest states of America, Erica Hamilton and Dick had a charming house, commanding glorious views over mountains, woods, and a broad river. They called it a summer house, but spent a great part of the year there, for they were by no means cut off from their fellow creatures, and during the holiday season gay parties of friends visited them frequently from a great hotel which was within a short drive.

The road leading to their house could be seen from the verandah, and Erica coming in one morning from her garden with a great basket of roses saw a carriage evidently on its way to their abode.

"Dick! here are some good folks coming to lunch," she cried gaily, putting her head into his smoking-room window.

"All right, I have just done. I dare say it's the Brownriggs or Mustertons," he replied. "I'll just get out some more wine."

His hospitable cares delayed him for a few moments. He heard the carriage drive up, and returned to the verandah, which was Erica's favourite place of reception, to come face to face with Cecil and a stranger. Her bright eyes gleamed with fire as she noted his embarrassment and surprise, but she passed him by, and running up to Erica gave her an eager hug, saying merrily, "None of your British starch, Erica, child, it's no use; I am the sinner that repenteth, and as I surmise this is a little heaven on earth, it's your business to rejoice tenfold over me."

Erica needed little pressing. After a moment's hesitation she returned the embrace as heartily as it was given, and then Cecil turned back to Dick with outstretched hand. "Shake, Dick," she said; "I mean to be friends, so just give in quick. This is my husband, John Sewell, and he knows, and I daresay Erica there knows, that I was head under in love with you once, but I would not have you at a gift now. John has been in love with me since we were two naughty little urchins garter high, and he is the right man for me. So come now, Dick, let's shake," and they shook with a will, too.

For after all what is the good of quarrelling with a very pretty girl because she was in love with you—especially if your wife and her husband do not mind?

A Whiff of Perfume.

SWEET scents which please the sense of smell have been sought and loved from earliest times. They were the delight of the Hebrews, and in hourly requisition in their private life and in their public services. Equally were they a means of pleasure to the fastidious Greek. Homer speaks of them in terms of high praise :

" Spirit divine whose exaltation greets
The sense of gods with more than mortal sweets."

His heroes were fragrant with odorant ointments. Odysseus of the brave heart used rich unguents wherewith to anoint his limbs, and the goddesses were so generous in their gifts of perfumed oils, that his skin became silken and divine as that of the gods themselves. His heroines, though women of strong minds, were not averse to the use of those arts which add charm to the person and pleasure to the senses. Daily they smoothed out all creases with fragrant ointments ; their hair they made glossy with unctuous perfumes. Their chests of linen, their embroidered robes, their furniture had the sweet scent of flowers. The floors of their dwellings they cooled by sprinkling perfumed water, and at the porticos hung bunches of aromatic herbs.

The wealthier Greeks and Romans carried unguents and perfumes about with them in small boxes of costly material and exquisite workmanship.

Masusius, the Roman knight, poor, but learned ; Anacreon, the wise and illustrious ; and Alexis, the comic poet, agree that perfumes soothe and invigorate the brain. The latter says :

" The best recipe for health
Is to apply sweet scents unto the brain."

" His nose he anoints, and thinks it plain,
'Tis good for health with scents to feed the brain."

The ancients believed the breast to be the seat of the soul, hence they frequently anointed that part of the body, especially before worship, as an oblation, and after any act of defilement as a means of purification. The head they mollified with unguents, to prevent dryness, which has a withering effect on the hair ; and to give elasticity to the skin and counteract the effects of the sun, the whole body they habitually rubbed with oleaginous essences.

Thus the original object of applying unguents was to preserve the health and suppleness of the body. But in later times the major use of perfumes was to diffuse redolence and render the appearance more pleasant.

Democritus, the celebrated philosopher of Abdera, was highly pleased to moisten his "inward parts with fragrant honey, and his outward with rich unguents."

The complimentary bath which the Greeks provided for their guests was invariably followed by much unctuous rubbing and anointing with scented oils. When this people had attained its high level of civilization, as well as being most lavish, it was most exact in its use of perfumes. A special scent was reserved for anointing each part of the body. This is illustrated in some lines of Antiphanes, a comic poet of Smyrna:

"He really bathes

In a large gilded tub, and steeps his feet

And legs in rich Egyptian unguents.

His jaws and breast he rubs with thick palm oil,

And both his arms with extract sweet of mint.

His eyebrows and his hair with marjoram,

His knees and neck with essence of ground thyme."

The Greeks were specially fond of figures and symbols, and perhaps this particularizing is symbolical, and there is a vestige of superstition lurking within it.

Many of the ancient physicians, among them Criton and Hippocrates, used perfumes medicinally, and prescribed them largely for nervous diseases. One reveals to us that "perfume made from roses is suitable for drinking parties, and that made from myrtles and apples good for the stomach and for lethargic persons"

Oleaginous ointments, fragrant lotions, and sweet essences were supposed to have a wonderfully healing power. The Africans inhale aromatic vapours as a cure for malignant fever; and in the time of Queen Elizabeth they were counted a preventative against the plague. It is related that "during the great plague of Marseilles, four robbers invented an aromatic vinegar, by means of which they could rob the stricken without fear of infection."

On the day of Epiphany, instituted in honour of the Magi, a curious ceremony was performed, which ended by the carrying

round of a chafing dish, with burning frankincense, and the odour was sniffed by the household to keep off disease.

Frankincense has superior medicinal qualities, and is considered an antidote to hemlock. Avicenna, the Arabian physician, advised it as a cure for tumours, ulcers, and such like. The Turks esteem a poultice made of the leaves of the jasmine a safe remedy for the bite of a snake.

The food of the gods in the Greek Olympus is described as sweeter than honey, and of a most luscious fragrance. Also it was a restorative. Apollo, in the *Iliad*, saves the body of Sarpedonis from putrefaction by the application of ambrosia. In the *Æneid* Venus heals the wounds of her son by this perfumed food; and it is said that Bernice wife of Ptolemy Soter, tasted of it and was saved from death. The goddesses used it for the toilet, when they wished to appear specially captivating—Juno, when she adorned herself to meet Jupiter; Venus, when she presented herself to Æneas; and Psyche, when her heart palpitated at the coming of Cupid.

The Epicureans thought that perfume mixed with their wine enabled them to drink more plentifully, without leaving ill effects. Not the Epicureans only, but the Bacchantes mingled honey and a fragrant infusion of flowers in their wine cups. In the East, perfumed sherbets are much appreciated, as well as highly-scented cakes and lozenges.

Some insist, however, that perfumes have an evil effect upon certain constitutions. One writer affirms that if perfumes are too concentrated "they may give rise to serious symptoms, to convulsions and spasms or even death."

Plants with white blossoms have a larger proportion of fragrance. Lilac, heliotrope, myrtle, violet, lily of the valley, mignonette, and the pale rose furnish very sweet and choice perfumes. One of the most delicious of scents, and the only floral perfume which cannot be imitated, is the jasmine, or Persian "*yásmín*." It is greatly prized in the East, and referred to by Persian and Arabian poets. A variety of this flower, known as "*moogree*," is held sacred to Vishnu, and largely used in the Hindu religious ceremonies. Among the prospective delights of the Hindu paradise are the prodigality of rich perfumes and the gardens of jasmine and lilies. In Turkey the wood of the jasmine is made into long pipes, which are valued for their

aroma. The Chinese use the flower for scenting tea. An acre of land is computed to yield about five hundred pounds of flowers during a season. This is valued at from £25 to £35.

Perfumes are procured in several ways. From the wood, such as sandal; from the bark, as cinnamon; from the leaves, as patchouli; from the flowers, as rose; from the fruit, as citron; and from the seeds, as almond.

The resin is obtained by three methods. Either by distilling with water that part of the plant which contains the perfume; or by expression; that is, paring off the outer covering of the bark, leaf, or fruit, &c., placing the parings in a muslin bag and squeezing in a hydraulic press, then separating it from the water by a funnel, and filtering. The third way is by maceration, or infusing the flowers in heated fat or rectified spirits of wine.

The mixing and compounding of perfumes is an art requiring much care and experience. Dr. Septimus Piesse endeavoured to show that a scale existed among odours, as among sounds, and classified them to correspond with notes. One false note of odour, he says, like one false note of sound, will destroy the harmony.

In ancient days, sweet odours were obtained by burning aromatic gums and woods. Hence the word perfume, which is from the Latin *per*, through, *fumus*, smoke or vapour. From this arose the idea of incense in primitive worship. It was used by the Orientals long before it became known to the Western world. People of the East utilized it for sacrifice in their temples. At feasts it enhanced the pleasure of the senses. At funerals it was a bribe to appease the manes of the dead; and later, in theatres, a disinfectant against the unpleasant odours of a crowded building.

Pliny assures us that incense was not employed in sacrifice until after the Trojan war, when fragrant woods were applied to give an agreeable smell.

In an ancient magical MS. it is directed that three grains should be taken, with three fingers, and placed under the threshold to keep away evil spirits, which might come in the form of offensive odours.

Rue is called the "herb of grace," because it was supposed to have power over sprites and evil demons. In the early churches, as an emblem of remembrance and grace, it was used to sprinkle

holy water upon the congregation, to exorcise evil spirits, and as a recourse against hysteria and convulsions.

On the altars of Zoroaster, Confucius, Buddha, Mahomet, and in the temples of Egypt, India, China, Greece and Rome, incense ascended in sweet vapours as a perpetual memorial.

Perfumes were mingled with the sacrifices. Temples were adorned with fragrant flowers and aromatic herbs. And one of the most important personages in the ceremonies was the anointer. He purified the temple, all the furniture and utensils, and the people, by the sprinkling of consecrated perfumes. In many cases he was compounder, and held the mysteries of the many redolent and innocuous preparations employed in religious worship.

Yearly, the Arabs brought as a tribute to Darius a thousand talents of incense. And Herodotus relates that this quantity was annually burned by the Chaldeans on the altar of Bel at Babylon.

At Paphos, the famous city of Cyprus, on the hundred altars of Venus, Arabian frankincense was daily consumed. The votaries of Mercury, the holder of secrets, sprinkled themselves generously with perfumes; their bodies they made sweet with unguents, and gay with wreaths of laurel leaves. The god, radiant and proud, holds in one hand a purse, emblematic of his interest in merchandise; a cock on his wrist, a sign of vigilance; at his feet a goat, a scorpion and a fly; one foot rests upon a tortoise. Milk and honey are first offered, a symbol of the sweetness and smoothness of his speech. The tongues of animals are then thrown into the burning incense, a token of the god's eloquence, which can prevail over everything.

The Greeks being especially sensitive to beauty and sweetness in every form, and believing all beautiful things to be divine gifts, they consecrated their noblest and fairest works to the gods, and prominent amongst their various tributes were perfumes of rare fragrance and costly essences. In nearly all their sacrificial offerings some of these were employed. If for animal sacrifice, which was offered in the open air, a pile of aromatic woods was arranged upon the altar; on this the victim was laid, decked with flowers. The woods were lighted, and the flames fed by oils and ointments of sweet aroma, and round were scattered scented herbs sacred to the deity.

In ceremonies connected with the famous Eleusinian mysteries which were specially noted for their magnificence and secret rites, where excitement, rapt devotion and night wandering much heightened the effect, perfumes were lavishly used. Maidens before marching in procession were purified by the sprinkling of consecrated perfume. On their brows they wore garlands of sweet flowers and crowns of myrtle. They washed their hands in scented water, and carried baskets of nosegays and wafers.

In the Eastern paradise, as in the Greek, bowers of heavy blossoms diffuse their rich redolence ; refreshing dews bathe the face with fragrance ; fountains of dashing spray weep odorous essences ; and rivers of priceless attars flow round the celestial city.

Frankincense is the purest of all incense ; it is a gum resin from an Arabian terebinth. To obtain this, a deep incision is made in the trunk, and below it a narrow strip of bark peeled off ; when the exudation has hardened the incision is deepened. In about three months the resin has acquired a sufficient degree of consistency. It is gathered in large quantities and packed in goat skins. It was formerly believed that the trees which yielded frankincense were infested by winged serpents, and the only way to be rid of them, and to get at the treasure, was by burning gum styrax, an odoriferous balsam of aromatic smell. Frankincense was forbidden to be used for embalming, as it was sacred to sacrificial purposes. The Israelites were strictly prohibited from compounding it.

Now it is used largely in Roman Catholic and High Church ceremonies. The thurible is swung, the incense burns with a bright white flame, the choir chants its hymns of petition and penitence, and the song and the perfume arise together.

In the time of St. Silvester, the Emperor Constantine made an offering in the basilica of St. Marcellinus and St. Peter at Rome of a hundred pounds weight of frankincense.

The best quality is exported from Africa ; an inferior kind is found on the mountains of India.

Myrrh, which was fabulously supposed to be the tears of Myrrha, who was turned into a shrub, was a plant of handsome appearance, with spreading, fern-like foliage and large umbels of white flowers. It was found principally in Arabia and Abyssinia. In early times the perfume distilled from it was greatly in requisition for embalming.

Herodotus gives a detailed account of the ancient mode of embalming, which is perhaps more instructive than pleasing. After the body had undergone much preparation, which, to spare your feelings, I will not describe, it was filled with powdered myrrh, cassia, and other perfumes. It was then steeped in natron, a strong solution of soda, for seventy days. After this, it was wrapped in bands of fine perfumed linen, smeared with aromatic gums.

Not only people were thus embalmed, but the crocodiles of Lake Moeris, which, after their mummification, were decorated with ornaments and jewels, and laid in one of the subterranean passages of the great Labyrinth with much pomp and display. The sacred cat, ichneumon, and other cherished animals devoutly worshipped by the Egyptians, were embalmed with scrupulous and fanatical care. On days special to the memory of the dead, the mummies were newly sprinkled with perfume, incense was offered before them, and their heads anointed with fresh oil—in the same spirit as we lay new blooms upon the graves of our dead.

Even the human forms of their gods, when relinquished by the divine element, were embalmed by their devotees. The body of Osiris, the sun god, was filled with herbs, fragrant spices, and drugs of costly ingredients. His shroud, which was of the finest linen, was steeped in rich oils and smeared with aromatic resins. His mummy was placed in a golden chest set with jewels, and this was repositied in one of the temples, where incense perpetually ascended in his honour, and flowers of delicious perfume were laid at his feet.

The Babylonians bury their dead in scented honey, and they are not alone in their strange custom. The American Indians have a peculiar mode of burial. The skin of the dead is thoroughly oiled and perfumed, and the body dressed in its richest attire. It is then encased in bark and round it is thrown a buffalo's hide, and thus it is left on a scaffold erected in the prairie. The skulls of the dead are bleached and placed in circles of a hundred or more, each resting upon a bunch of fragrant herb. The relatives know the skull of their friend, and go regularly to watch it and take food.

In the libations of the Greeks, Egyptians and others, perfume was largely used. Herodotus mentions the incident of the twelve kings of Egypt who were offering sacrifice in the Temple of

Vulcan. At the door of the temple, on the great altar, were laid bundles of sandal-wood and cinnamon. Upon these the sacrificial boar was stretched, the fire lighted, pastils of incense thrown in, and the smoke and "nidrous smells" rose high to heaven. Then into the inner courts marched the royal procession, preceded by incense burners, who bore golden salvers, and by the smaller altar the kings knelt in prayer. The priest, rising, sprinkled consecrated perfume over them, and brought forth the golden beakers for libation. But the old man, a little muddle-headed, counted eleven cups as twelve. Psammetichus, who was left without, took off his brass helmet, and in that offered the perfumed wine to Vulcan, the fire god. Previous to this the oracle had declared that he who offered a libation in a cup of brass should be sole King of Egypt. Unconsciously Psammetichus had fulfilled the condition, and he was therewith proclaimed king.

Though perfume may be the outcome of civilization, and more lavishly used by nations well to the front in manners and polish, there are instances of people of great demoralization who use it in some of their horrible customs. The Fetishmen of Ashanti supply an illustration of this, who for the benefit of young soldiers concoct a mixture of blood, of human hearts, and of fragrant herbs, and Bettany, quoting from Beecham, says, "All who have never before killed an enemy in battle eat of the preparation, it being believed that if they did not their energy would be secretly wasted by the haunting spirits of deceased foes."

Rose has a most powerful aroma—the finest extract was said in early times to be procured from Libya. It requires a hundred thousand roses to yield a hundred and eighty grains of attar. The Orientals have a partiality for this perfume. A historian tells us that "when Saladin took Jerusalem in 1188 he ordered the interior of Omar's mosque to be washed with rose water." Five hundred camels were employed to bring the attar from Damascus. As a token of welcome to strangers, the people of the East still sprinkle rose perfume upon them.

The Mohammedans, Turks, and Persians were fond of lighting aromatic herbs, and holding their beards over the salvers of smoking incense. The heads of honoured guests were anointed with perfumed oil which was procured by putting blossoms of

mogree, jasmine, and other highly-scented flowers into most delicate oils. These were preserved in small bottles, stopped with cotton and wax.

I have already referred to the bath of perfumes; this, of course, was used only by the more voluptuous ancients, but to wash the hands in perfume at feasts was quite common. Antiphanes, in his "*Corycus*," disdainfully says, "they anointed their hands with perfumes, despising the crumbs of bread on which the Lacedæmonians at banquets used to wipe their hands!" And Lysias, in his speech against Alcibiades, expatiates upon that general's weaknesses, and with much scorn says, "with all his golden washhand basins and incense burners."

The use of perfume was indulged in to such an extravagant degree that some of the more ascetic men had good reason to denounce it. Solon issued an edict prohibiting its sale in Athens. Julius Cæsar and Lucinus, who were Roman consuls in 565, published a law forbidding the sale of exotics in that city. And by the laws of Lycurgus, perfumers were expelled from Sparta as being wasters of oil and encouragers of sensuousness. Clearchus wrote against the excessive use of unguents, and Socrates declaimed against them in strong terms, preferring, he said, "the smell of healthy toil and the perfume of a good and manly life." It was customary at festivals to pass round to the guests perfumes, served in alabaster boxes and vessels of gold. At one of these feasts, Cynulcus, who loved to deride the youth for the use of perfumes, was made a butt for their ridicule. Some mischievous youth anointed the cynic with much ointment, pouring it lavishly over his head and face. When he awoke he exclaimed in an angry voice, "What is this? O Hercules, will not some one come with a sponge and wipe my face, which is thus polluted with a lot of dirt?"

At the Syrian banquets it was usual for the slaves to come in with bladders full of Babylonian perfumes and bedew the garlands and walls and hangings, and fill the halls with delicious fragrance. In some of the more modern feasts statues and ornaments were provided with jets which threw out diluted essences and attars.

The Mussulmans of India, on the wedding morning, invariably present their brides with a "*singardan*," or toilet bag, containing, among other necessities, a box of betel leaves, an aromatic

mixture for chewing, a vial of attar of roses, and a goolabpash, with which to sprinkle rose water on the visitors.

These ladies rub pulvil or scented powder on their bodies, sprinkle perfume on their clothes, use precious unguents after washing, and paint and perfume their faces.

The peasants of Cyprus, who are greatly fond of dress and finery, tie round the head a bright silk handkerchief, plait the hair, and fasten on the side bunches of jasmine and sweet-scented geranium leaves.

The soldiers of the Crusades brought back to England the love for Eastern perfumes. They introduced the custom of dipping the fingers into water highly scented with rose, after meals.

And, later, the dandy of the sixteenth century scented his periwig with fragrant powders; his moustache with cosmetics of apple or labdanum. He sprinkled his brocaded surtout with lavender or rosemary; his linen with violets; his gloves with benzoin or musk; and his poodle with civet or ambergris. His bedroom was fumigated with favourite odours; his table decorated with "pot-pourri" and sprays yielding sweet scents; and his food flavoured with wines of delicate bouquet. It was the age of perfumes. The vanity of Queen Elizabeth seized upon this alluring luxury as eagerly as any of her subjects.

Cosmetics and fragrant oils for the hair; rouges, powders, pastes and lotions for the face; perfumed soaps for the hands; sachets for the bureau; essences for the handkerchief and ruffles; pastilles, narcissus and iris roots for the breath, were in constant request.

In the following century Samuel Pepys baptized his satin breeches and his silk stockings with bergamot, and made his ruffles odoriferous with musk or patchouli. And not long ago the fops and popinjays of Vanity Fair vied with one another in strong scents and ointments. Gay, a poet of that age of vanities, sings:

"The toilette, nursery of charms.
Completely furnished with bright beauty's arms,
The patch, the powder box, pulvil, perfumes."

Musk is a favourite aroma of the Chinese. The animal from which the perfume is procured inhabits the elevated plateaus and mountainous regions of Central Asia, also Tonquin and Thibet. The substance is found in a gland or bag, about

the size of a hen's egg, which lies near the navel of the male musk deer. When first procured it is a viscid fluid of very strong odour, which, however, dries into a powder. It comes next to the attar of roses in the estimation of the Orientals, who mix it with the mortar in the erection of some of their sacred buildings.

They also make use of it as a toilet accessory, and keep it in small alabaster sphinxes and other Egyptian figures used for smelling bottles. The Jewish women have small boxes of perfumes hanging at the end of their necklaces, and carry fragrant herbs in small bags, or sewn up in their clothes.

The Bedouins perfume their handkerchiefs with an odoriferous earth called "ares," which comes from Aden, South of Arabia, and is in much requisition by the desert Arabs. These nomad people use civet to anoint their bodies, a substance of the consistency of honey, taken from the anal glands of the civet cat, strong and offensive in itself, but agreeable when a very small proportion is mixed with other ingredients. Kitto says that "Arabs do not salute, they simply *smell* each other. It is common for a parent to say, 'Ah, child, thy smell is like the Sen-Paga-Poo,' a flower sacred to Chrisna."

However agreeable this may be to the nostrils of the Bedouin the mixture of the odours of dirty skins and the strong civet perfume is a graveolence anything but pleasant to the European nose.

Some perfumes have a stronger scent than others, some give out their fragrance at special times. Certain flowers need the warmth of the sun, some the soft rain, and others the cool night air before they venture to throw out their redolence into the atmosphere. Bartholm says, "the odour of rosemary indicates the coast of Spain more than ten leagues out to sea." And another writer declares that the "whole air of South Asia is filled with the smoke and odour of perfume."

In Capua there was one long street called "The Seplasia," which consisted entirely of perfume and unguent shops. And in Bombay, much the greater proportion of wares exhibited in the bazaars are perfumes, of endless varieties.

In hot countries, the frequent use of perfumes is a sanitary necessity, and acts as a disinfectant against the impurities of the atmosphere.

Balm was much prized by the natives of Judea and Arabia, from whence it was procured. Pliny says that Vespasian and Titus had shrubs of it growing in Rome, which were carefully tended, the branches being carried by the Romans in their triumphal processions. To gather the balsam was a slow and tedious task. Alexander the Great thought it a fair midsummer day's work to fill a "concha" with balm, that is, less than a thousandth part of a pint.

Cinnamon is an aromatic bark of odorous fragrance. It is a native of Ceylon and India. Kitto tells us that it is "precious, and appropriate to religious use. It is much valued, and was the first spice sought after, or procured in all Oriental voyages, ancient or modern." The Egyptians and Romans held it in high esteem. Herodotus assures us that a species of cinnamon was taken from the nests of birds, and also found sticking like lime to the beards of goats. This substance was gathered, compounded, and used as ointments and salves.

The South of France is the flower garden of Europe. Flower farming is extensive in the Var valley, and covers about a hundred and fifteen thousand English acres. These gardens produce over three thousand tons of flowers annually.

Lavender is our English production, and is cultivated about Hertford, Surrey and several other districts. Its name, *lavan-dula*, from *lavare*, to wash, indicates its use, which was perfuming the baths of wealthy people. Its flowers are considered excellent for disorders of the head and nerves. There are districts of lavender fields in Spain and North Africa, where it thrives mostly on high sea levels.

Sweet as are the influences of perfume as a panacea for wounds—a tonic for flagging health—a refreshment of the heat and dust—a luxury for the toilet—and a delicious, permeating gratification for the senses—we would stop short of the custom of the Carmani, who mingle their companions' blood with fragrant sherbet, and quaff it as a pledge of friendship, sealing the compact with much mutual anointing of spikenards and attars. This, to say the least, is exaggerating the province of perfumes.

The House with the Lilac Curtains.

By MARY MACLEOD.

"NONSENSE!" said I.

"That's you, Peter, all over," said my wife. "When you don't understand a thing, or haven't observed it——"

"Or it isn't there, either to understand or observe——"

"You say 'Nonsense!' and think it settles the matter. But it doesn't, by a long way."

Robin was quite ruffled. When she was in a mood like this she always reminded me of one of her own little namesakes, and aroused a wicked desire to tease and caress her at the same moment.

"Well, little Ducky-daddles, she *shall* have her own way, then!" I said soothingly. "There *shall* be a dark and dismal mystery about a very prosaic house, and a wild and thrilling romance about a very ordinary-looking young couple. In the dearth of all subjects of interest in this out-of-the-way hamlet of London, we will conjure up an exciting melodrama that shall have for its scene the awe-inspiring habitation over the way—to wit, the House with the Lilac Curtains."

"Peter, you are too ridiculous," said Robin, "and I don't care what you say. I'm quite convinced there's something queer about the people who live in No. 27. Why, they don't even keep a servant! And the other morning, when I was looking out of the window, quite early, I actually saw the wife cleaning the front doorsteps with her very own hands! What do you say to that?"

"That they do her infinite credit." For indeed the imposing flight that led up to the modest little house was of dazzling whiteness.

"Well, with all these horrid dynamiters about, perhaps the people over the way have very good reasons for not letting any one see inside their house," said Robin darkly; and tossing her head with a gesture which she flattered herself was dignified, she went off to consult with our small domestic on the important subject of dinner.

Left alone, I strolled to the window and took a survey of the house that had aroused my wife's curiosity. It stood exactly opposite our own in the row of neat little semi-detached villas that went by the name of Alexandra Grove. To my unobservant

masculine eye there seemed nothing especially remarkable about it, unless it were the fact that all the windows were closely draped with filmy muslin of a rather ugly mauve shade. Other windows in the terrace presented a variety of appearance—there were light curtains, and heavy ones; curtains looped back and curtains drawn well forward; cane blinds, wire blinds, stained glass, ground glass, reed blinds—the same house often displaying a different specimen in bed-room, drawing-room, and breakfast parlour. In no other habitation, however, was there the same uniformity that distinguished the one over the way—each window closely shrouded from ceiling to floor with soft folds of mauve-coloured muslin.

One thing at least was evident, the inmates were resolved that no prying outsider should catch a glimpse of anything that went on within.

As I stood idly gazing, the door opposite opened, and a young man came out. He was tall and gentlemanly, but very thin and ill-looking, with an indescribable air of hopeless unprosperity. He carried under his arm a well-worn leather portfolio.

The figure of a woman came with him to the door; she seemed a slight, girlish creature in a faded blue cotton gown.

"Good luck!" she cried, and waved a smiling farewell, which changed to sudden gravity as the gate clashed behind him. Then the door shut, and I remembered it was time for my own departure to my daily grind in the city.

Somehow the little picture I had seen kept recurring to my memory. The young couple reminded me in an odd way of Robin and myself.

"Just so we might have looked," I thought, "if Uncle Christopher had not given me that post on his paper."

And then a vision of Robin on her knees scrubbing our front doorsteps thrust itself with unwelcome pertinacity between my eyes and the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*.

It was very absurd to be so absorbed in the imaginary woes of quite unknown people. I could have shaken myself for such stupidity.

Uncle Christopher was the proprietor of a well-known and popular magazine. He was also by way of being editor-in-chief, but as in the case of many other similar periodicals, all the work and none of the glory fell to the share of the insignificant "Sub."

Parnassus, the magazine in question, shared Mr. Christopher Dane's affections with his yacht "Iris" and his two famous racing colts "Gilderoy" and "Glen Garry," so I need scarcely say that *Parnassus* did not receive his undivided attention. Uncle Kit, however, was erratic in his movements, very apt to turn up when least wanted, sweeping like a whirlwind through the office, overhauling everything, and upsetting in a moment the arrangements I had been laboriously making for weeks. When he was in one of these editorial moods his vigour was appalling—every manuscript had to be submitted to him ; authors, artists, engravers, printers, all came in for a torrent of abuse ; nothing was right, everything was going to the dogs ; it was clearly to be seen how deplorably wanted was the "master's eye."

After a week or two of this unwonted exertion his interest would flag. All editorial matters would be tumbled back pell-mell on my shoulders, and having succeeded in creating a score of muddles, and trampling ruthlessly on the feelings of all our best contributors, Uncle Kit would forswear Fleet Street, and retire to the wilds of Yorkshire, or the waters of the English Channel.

At the time of which I write I had endured an unusually long spell of my chief's companionship. For fully three weeks he had come regularly to the office, and now, as he expressed it, he had "got the reins well in hand." On the day in question when I arrived I found him already installed at his desk, a pile of open letters and manuscripts in front of him, and a gloomy frown on his forehead.

"Well, you *are* early!" he remarked, with ponderous sarcasm. "You don't mean to say you have actually contrived to get here! Why, it's not half-past ten yet. I'm afraid you must have hurried over breakfast." Then, with a sudden change of tone, "Here, cart away this drivell—send 'em all back!"

He swept a heap of papers towards me as he spoke.

"I'm in a devil of a temper, and there's no denying it. Some blithering idiot of a stable-boy has let Glen Garry down. Ten to one he's broken his knees. Perkins tries to make light of the matter, but I know he's hiding something from me. I don't know why I can never get the truth from *any* one. There, take away that trash, and don't let it lumber up the office a moment longer than can be helped."

I returned to my desk, and set about my butcherly task of

"slaughtering the innocents." How many an unfortunate wretch must have loathed the sight of my handwriting!

I was about half-way through the papers when my eye was caught by a letter bearing the familiar address, Alexandra Grove, No. 27.

"By jingo! The house with the lilac curtains!" I thought.

The letter was to say that the writer would call that morning to offer some drawings which he ventured to hope would prove acceptable for the pages of *Parnassus*. It was signed "Oliver Medway."

"Poor Mr. Oliver Medway, I'm afraid you'll get but a short shrift and a quick execution!" I thought, as I glanced at my uncle's lowering brow. However, as good luck would have it, Uncle Kit had left the office before the visitor's timid rap sounded on the ground-glass panel of the door.

Mr. Medway entered with a nervous, deprecating air painfully suggestive of constant rebuffs. His large dark eyes gazed at me appealingly like those of a startled hare. His lean white fingers trembled as he untied the strings of the shabby portfolio. One by one he produced the poor little attempts which he had "ventured to hope would prove acceptable to the pages of *Parnassus*."

They were hopeless—weak of the weak, badly drawn, commonplace, utterly devoid of merit or interest. Was it not a cruel kindness even to speak words of encouragement to the producer of such wretched stuff as these?

Once again I heard the wafted words, "Good luck!" and saw the girlish figure in the faded cotton gown, and then I found my tongue faltering over the customary formula, "Very sorry, so *very* crowded—no space for months ahead," &c. I felt like a murderer plunging a knife into his victim.

Perhaps something in my manner to start with had raised false hopes in the heart of the poor young artist, but when he fully grasped the fact that I was going through the usual proceedings of "declining with thanks" a wan smile flickered over his thin face, and he hastened to hide away the poor little despised drawings with fingers that trembled even more than when he had produced them. If possible, I should say his face also went a shade whiter, but that could scarcely be.

"I quite understand," he said, with a brave attempt at cheerfulness; "you must be simply overwhelmed with contributions.

Such a splendid magazine as *Parnassus* is, too! Of course you have all the best artists of the day." He paused, then went on with a slight effort, "May I ask if you could recommend to me any other magazine that you think these drawings might suit?"

I felt like a traitor—surely it was only prolonging his torture?—but I mentioned the names of some pictorial publications which might *possibly* have an opening. He thanked me in a voice that was resolutely steady, but all the courage in the world could not take away that drawn look round the lips, nor the unconscious expression of pathos in the wistful eyes.

He bade me good day, and left the room. What sudden impulse made me open the door and call him back? It was pure idiotcy on my part. What good in the long run would it do the poor wretch to have one or two drawings taken when all others were inevitably doomed to rejection? How would the artistic reputation of *Parnassus* suffer, too, if it became known that this class of work ran any chance of acceptance! All the same—

"Oh, Mr. Medway, it has just struck me, may I have another look at your portfolio?"

It was distinctly embarrassing—my late visitor had quietly subsided on to the stone steps that led to other offices on the floor above; and there was a suspicious moistness about his eyes.

He rose hastily, a wave of colour rushing over his pale face.

"I beg your pardon," he said, somewhat unsteadily, "I must apologize for sitting on your steps. I'm a little tired. I have been walking about for some hours, and it's very foolish of me, but somehow I felt a little faint. I thought the feeling would go off if I rested for a few minutes."

Tired? No wonder; one unbroken series of rebuffs would wear out the stoutest heart, especially in a half-starved body.

Once again I went through the collection of dreadful little drawings, with cold-blooded desperation picked out three at random, and hid the others away in their receptacle. What a change came over my visitor! His face glowed with delight, his figure seemed to expand and lose its expression of nervous timidity. One question hovered on his lips, but he lacked assurance to speak it.

"With regard to terms," I said, in my most official manner, "we generally pay on publication" (I felt rather than saw the breathless suspense that hung on my words); "but in the case

of small things like these it will save trouble if I give you a cheque at once."

"Thank you, just as you please, whatever is usual," murmured the young man.

"Hang it all, there goes Robin's and my trip to Burnham Beeches!" I thought with much disgust, as a mauve-coloured slip of paper passed from my hand to the pocket of my unwelcome visitor. It is scarcely necessary to remark that the signature at the foot was connected with my own private banking account, for it was hardly to be expected that *Parnassus* should support my editorial aberrations to the extent of purchasing the work of Mr. Oliver Medway.

The young man went away radiant. As for me, it may as well be frankly confessed that I spent the rest of the day in a state of bounding ill-temper. It is peculiarly irritating to see utter incompetence combined with urgent want.

My ill-humour was not improved later on by the return of Uncle Christopher to the office, and the subsequent discovery by him of the wretched works of art. I had thrust them, as I fondly hoped, out of sight into a dusty pigeon-hole, but Uncle Kit was in one of his prowling moods, and he ferreted them out with the swiftness of a pursuing Nemesis. We had a brisk passage-at-arms, in which I made no explanation except that they were "private property," and in which Uncle Kit as much as told me he didn't believe me, accused me of squandering the editorial funds, and remarked that I was totally unfitted for the post of responsibility which he had been fool enough to give me. Of course there was only one reply to be made to this. I made it with all the dignity that was suitable to the occasion, and left the office with the cheerful reflection that my post as assistant editor of *Parnassus* would probably soon be a thing of the past.

I reached home at six o'clock, let myself in with my latchkey, and went into the drawing-room. No Robin, no fire, only a handful of ashes in the untidy grate. How empty and uncomfortable the house seemed. More food for ill-temper here.

But before I could summon Matilda, our small domestic, to inquire for her mistress, the culprit herself appeared.

"Peter, you'll never, *never* guess where I've just come from," she cried, her eyes shining with excitement.

"From walking to and fro——"

"Bad boy, hush——"

"In the High street," I concluded, "staring into all the shop windows, and calculating how many new frocks you 'simply must have, to be decent.'"

"Why, you know you said yourself, Peter, that my grey cloth was settling down to a sober old age—or something else equally rude," said Robin indignantly. "But never mind, I've something far more important to tell you. I've actually been inside *the house with the lilac curtains*!"

She paused to enjoy my surprise.

"This was how it was. Mr. Medway—that's their name—had been out, and directly he got home this afternoon he just fainted dead away. The poor little wife was so frightened she ran across the road to ask if Matilda could go for a doctor. So I went over to see if there were anything I could do to help. Peter, do you know, I think they must be just *dreadfully* poor!"

Her voice sank to an awe-struck whisper.

"There was scarcely a thing in the house, and Mrs. Medway had no money—not a farthing. When her husband got better the first words he said were, 'I've sold three drawings—three guineas—look in my pocket,' and the wife gave such a scream of joy—and she clasped her hands—and then I thought I had better leave them. So I went downstairs to make some tea, and there was scarcely any food in the larder, and only a handful of coals in the cellar. And there's very little furniture in any of the rooms."

"Well, why do they deck up their house in that ridiculous fashion, with all that lilac muslin?" I asked grumpily.

"Mrs. Medway told me about that, too. When they married, some rich, eccentric aunt gave them all that muslin as a wedding present, yards and yards and *yards* of it. Wasn't it silly? She had had it by her for years, and didn't know what to do with it. Mrs. Medway thought she might as well use it to cover the windows, so that the neighbours shouldn't spy out the emptiness of the rooms."

"So that explains the grand mystery of the shrouded house?"

"Yes, really the way people talk is too ridiculous! To hear some of the remarks they made about No. 27, one might have thought there was something awful going on there."

"How very foolish of them! But, Robin, if this aunt of theirs is so rich, why doesn't she do something for the young couple?"

"Because she is very angry with them. She hated the idea of Claudia marrying a poor man, and besides, she said, Mr. Medway would never get one of his pictures sold. He had a small income when Claudia married him, but since then he has lost every penny. They have really been in dreadful need, but were too proud to apply to her for help."

"Well, they'd better put their pride in their pocket; they don't seem to have much else there," I remarked unkindly.

"Claudia—she said I was to call her that—is so delighted about Mr. Medway's selling his drawings. She says it will encourage him so to go on with his work."

"Yes, that's the worst of it."

"Why, Peter, how oddly you speak. One would think you were *sorry* for the poor young fellow's success," said Robin, surveying me severely.

"My love, what a preposterous idea!" I ejaculated feebly.

"Anyhow, Claudia is going to write about it to her aunt, and tell her how ill Mr. Medway is. She thinks when she finds out that he is really so clever and gets his work taken by the best magazines, she will make it all up and be friends again."

"Let us devoutly hope so," I murmured.

And ridiculously sanguine as this seemed, it was what actually did happen.

Coming home one afternoon I saw an unwonted flutter of excitement in the respectable, if somewhat drowsy, precincts of Alexandra Grove. All the Bates children stood in a bevy at the gate of No. 23; a white-capped head was thrust from the top front window opposite; the agitated figure of little Miss Timmins was clearly apparent through the wire gauze blind of No. 29. The object of all this interest and curiosity was a large handsome carriage with two large handsome horses, and a large—no, *not* handsome—coachman, which stood in front of No. 27. Presently the door opened, and a wizened little elderly lady appeared, followed by a tall, gaunt young man. After them, no longer in her faded cotton gown, but in a natty costume of fawn and brown, trimmed with soft fur, came Mrs. Medway.

She looked across at Robin, and smiled and nodded; and then the large fat horses moved off at a solemn amble of three miles

an hour, carrying to their new habitation the inmates of the house with the lilac curtains.

"It's all right," Robin explained to me gaily. "The old aunt is going to have them live with her. She has a great big lonely house up Highgate way. Mr. Medway is going to have a beautiful studio all to himself. Now that he has made such a splendid start, she thinks it would be a thousand pities not to keep on with his art. And Claudia and I think so, too. Don't you?"

"Certainly—of course—a thousand pities," I agreed fervently.

The next morning there was a solemn bonfire in the editorial grate.

The Haunted Monastery.

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IN the year 1875 I was the English partner in the firm of Innocenti and Co., Via Condotti, Rome, *bric-à-brac* dealers, money lenders, &c. The civil war which had thrust out the foreign mercenary was at an end, and a King had been placed at the Quirinal as the guardian of Italian liberty; under these circumstances it was a matter of course that a rush of tourists of all nationalities should invade the Imperial city, and in consequence our house was overwhelmed with orders for curios and antiquities of every description; the profits were enormous, as we bought and sold to equal advantage. The head partner was Signor Josef Innocenti, a stout, handsome man of fifty years, with his short-cut hair showing a tinge of grey at the temples.

Bruno, his only son, was a junior partner, but I had been one for seven years by the special favour of our head, who insisted on informing every one how I had saved his life and property, both of which were threatened, during the civil war, at Naples in 1859, and into which I had plunged as one of Garibaldi's orderly officers. But those days were long past, and seldom thought of.

Innocenti and Co. had left Naples and opened a business in Rome when Victor Emmanuel was proclaimed King of united Italy, and I was offered a share in it, which I accepted with gratitude.

One afternoon, late in May of this year, a Franciscan monk walked into our shop and presented a letter for the *padrone*, with the intimation that he was to wait for a reply.

Bruno, who always transacted business with our Italian customers, carried the missive to his father, and in a few minutes I was called into the office, when Signor Innocenti informed me that the letter was from the superior of Tertti Monastery, and contained the request that he would at once either come or send a trusted agent to him, adding in a postscript that Cardinal Antonelli had advised him to consult the firm on any subject connected with the sale or valuation of works of art.

"I must beg you to go," he said, holding out the note for me to read. "My sprained foot ties me to the office; and Bruno," he continued, smiling on his son, "knows he is too feather-headed and young to inspire confidence in a father superior. You, Marco, look much older than your age, and speak Italian like a Roman. Any valuation of paintings, coins, jewels and works of art you can make as well, or better, than any one in Italy. I shall write the superior that one of the firm will visit him to-morrow, and you will answer to the name of Innocenti; Bruno can take your duties, which will not be heavy, as the season is over."

When his father ceased speaking Bruno exclaimed:

"Tertti! that is the haunted monastery where the footsteps of the dead monks are heard and their figures seen wandering through the corridors if they die with a secret or with their sins unconfessed."

"Nonsense, Bruno," interrupted Signor Innocenti. "You are thinking of Orvieto and the tale of the mad monk who used to escape from the infirmary and scare the community occasionally."

Bruno shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Well, in any case, Marco is not afraid of ghosts, and can tell us if I am wrong when he comes back."

A letter was then written, appointing the next day for my visit to Tertti, and delivered to the messenger, who during the time he was waiting had studied his prayer-book or fingered the rosary that hung at his side. Immediately after his departure we discussed various matters of business and the details of my journey. It was certainly annoying to me that I should have to leave Rome at this period, as Leonora, the only daughter of Signor Innocenti, was daily expected with Carmina Nulla, her friend, from her convent school at Bologna. Though not a

beauty I thought her the most charming girl in the world, and as her visits were never prolonged beyond a week, it was provoking that duty obliged me to leave before her arrival, but I determined to hurry over my business and return quickly.

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It was early in the afternoon when I reached the railway station, which was three miles from the monastery. Here I found the monk whose acquaintance I had made yesterday; the superior had sent him to meet me, and he held a mule by the bridle, which he cautioned me was very fresh to-day and full of tricks.

I thanked him for the warning and then inquired my road to Tertti.

"Straight on," he replied; after leaving the station-cutting it would lie before me in the distance; I could not miss it."

I mounted and trotted briskly along; at the top of the hill I saw the monastery before me on a spur of the mountain, which stretched above the plain. It resembled a mediæval fortress, with its high grey stone walls; and the numerous towers, which ostentatiously bristled up in every quadrangle, must have been built for defence in the middle ages.

I galloped up the avenue at the suggestion of my mule, who had mended his pace the last mile (but I cannot believe that he was ever either lively or tricky), and reached the noble archway with its tower over the gates.

The porter had evidently been watching my progress, for he came out of a side wicket before I could spring from my saddle and ring the bell. He relieved me of the beast, and directed me to enter and cross the outer quadrangle, against the walls of which were built spacious outbuildings, stables and sheds for cattle, now, alas! in a state of ruin and decay. In the mediæval days these had been occupied by the horses and beasts of burden belonging to the guests who passed to and fro from Rome; for the monasteries in all countries were then the only hostels for the traveller.

I walked round the large crucifix in the centre, and was met by two monks at the door of the inner quadrangle: they led me to the strangers' parlour, where I remained for perhaps twenty minutes; then an older brother came and said the reverend father would receive me in his private apartments. I followed

him till we reached a large ante-chamber ; my guide opened one of the two doors in it and bade me enter.

The room was empty, and after glancing round I advanced to the narrow window cut in the thick outer wall, and gazed over the plain before me.

A slight rustle caused me the next moment to look round, and standing in the doorway I saw a man of most imposing height and appearance ; he was, however, painfully thin, careworn and sad-looking ; his close-cut hair was scanty and grey ; he wore the usual brown habit of the order, but wore it with a difference. I was about to bend and attempt to kiss his hand when he stopped me, saying :

" Signor Marco, I think we have met before, when your name was not Innocenti."

I stood quite bewildered by this address, and gazed at the speaker, puzzled to find some one knew me whom I did not recollect, though the voice seemed somewhat familiar. I shook my head doubtfully, and then with a smile and in a few words he brought to my memory the almost forgotten past, and told me we had been comrades—almost friends—during the wars which brought all classes and peoples to aid the struggle for liberty and unification in Italy.

" How did you recognize me ?" I inquired. " I cannot trace in you the least resemblance to one of my old companions in 1859-60."

" Have you forgotten Léon Kohary, and our fencing matches at Naples ?" was the reply, and slowly I began to realize that a page of the past I thought destroyed and forgotten was placed before me to refresh my memory.

" Tell me how you discovered me, Kohary. I am no longer the active young man of twenty-five, and it is fifteen years since we met."

" I have known for some months that you were living in Rome, and a partner in the important house of Innocenti and Co., and I trusted *you* would be sent to me in answer to my request, but I could not be certain till I saw you from the gate towers riding up the avenue ; then I remembered your mad race into Palermo on the bishop's mule we borrowed to carry dispatches to our general, and was relieved to recognize in the rider ' Marco, the Inglese,' as we called you. But we cannot exchange

experiences till our supper is over, and I am free for to-night to devote myself to you ; it will not appear strange to the brothers for my guest to come and spend the evening here, and we shall not be disturbed."

As he spoke the superior struck a bell, and in a few moments the venerable old monk, Brother Anthony, appeared. I was given into his charge, with instructions to place me in the rooms called St. Jerome's, and attend to my requirements ; then with a gesture of the hand I was dismissed.

Brother Anthony preceded me along the narrow stone corridor and down countless steps till we reached the chapel cloisters, with the mixture of flower garden and burial ground in the centre. After passing through this we turned into a passage, at the end of which my guide unlocked a door, and said, "Ecco, signór ;" he pointed to my travelling bag on the table and asked what I required, and when I said, "Only a jug of water," he smiled, and said no doubt I was Inglese—and with the promise to return presently he closed the door.

I listened to his footsteps till they ceased, and then made a hasty inspection of my quarters, which consisted of two rooms and a loggia wide enough for exercise in wet weather. A square opening in the outside wall of the monastery lighted this, and was two hundred feet above the rocky ravine below ; a stone bench was placed conveniently near it, and I sat down to think.

My eyes wandered aimlessly over the extended view before me, caused by a gap in the range of mountains, while my thoughts were employed with the history of my old companion, the superior, and with wondering how he could have obtained his present position. I had known him formerly as the most independent freethinker and irreverent jester in the battalion, a very courageous soldier and accomplished swordsman, the pride of his regiment, because he was the tallest and the handsomest of all Garibaldi's volunteers. What convulsion, political or religious, could have thrown him into the arms of the Church, or have induced him to take the vows of a Franciscan monk ? It was useless to conjecture : I must wait for his explanation, so I rose from my seat and began to study my surroundings.

The walls and ceilings of the two rooms were covered with frescoes of scenes from the life of St. Jerome, and I felt certain they were the work of Perugino or of his pupils ; the colouring

was as vivid as when they were painted. At the end of the inner chamber was a large oil painting of the Assumption of the Virgin, which could only have been painted by the hand of the Umbrian master himself; this I assumed to be the treasure which I was sent for to value, and I placed myself before it to examine its beauties carefully.

A low wooden bedstead with a mattress and blankets, a chair and a praying bench, were the only contents of this room; a stone receptacle for holy water was placed near the archway at the entrance. There was no door except the outer one; in this was cut the sliding panel, which was opened from the passage, so that the head of the monastery could at any moment of the day or night inspect the cell.

After I had unpacked my travelling bag, which lay on the table in the entrance room, I returned to the painting, and was startled in a few moments by a voice at my elbow announcing that Brother Anthony had sent him to guide me to the refectory.

I turned and found my companion was a young monk, who stood with eyes cast down and his hands folded in the sleeves of his habit.

I accompanied him, and found my seat was to be at the end of the superior's table, and our supper, though not luxurious, was sufficiently good and plentiful.

One of the brothers read from the stone pulpit in the centre the portions for the evening exercise, and after our meal was ended all passed before the superior and made a low reverence, which he answered by raising his hand and blessing them.

When all had left he turned to me and invited me to come to his rooms for a cup of coffee, which he said his doctor had insisted on his taking every evening since his long illness a few years back.

When we reached the outer hall he carefully bolted the door, and we entered his room, when he lighted his oil stove and prepared the coffee.

"I shall have two hours now free," said my companion, after a few moments, "as my chaplain will conduct the service in the chapel to-night, and your coffee is ready: sit down in the old leather chair and I will begin my story. I know you find it difficult to believe that any circumstances could have been weighty enough to induce me to exchange the red shirt for the

brown habit of the monk, but as I seek your aid I must explain to you how the events of the last fifteen years have combined to place me in authority here.

"We parted in 1861, as you no doubt remember, when our brave chief returned to Caprera. My destination was Munich, where my father was established as *maitre d'armes* to the Royal family and court. We are members of the younger branch of the Hungarian Counts of Kohary, and this doubtless was one of the reasons that the fencing school was sought by the Bavarian nobles. After a short rest I found amusement in practising with the more advanced pupils and in giving lessons to the younger men.

"In the first class were the two Barons Swatzhof, Otto and Carl; the eldest was only twenty-two years of age, and both were distinguished by their skill in all manly exercises. We very soon became intimate acquaintances. I was constantly invited to the Swatzhof palace, where I met my fate and fell deeply in love with the young sister of my friends; but I received a cruel wound when, on proposing for her hand after I had ascertained that my love was returned, I was coldly informed that even if the Countess Hilda wished to form a *mésalliance* with the son of a *maitre d'armes* her family would prefer to bury her in a convent; and Otto warned me in the most insulting terms that if I ventured to speak or write to his sister, either he or Carl would shoot me without warning.

"Hilda was then carried off to Paris, but contrived to send me a few lines by her maid, entreating me to rescue her from the harsh treatment she was receiving.

"I followed the family immediately, and with the connivance of Lisa very soon met my love frequently; and when we heard that it was the brothers' intention to leave their sister in the charge of an aunt who was the head of the convent at St. Denis, we arranged to fly to England. In London, with the help of my German friends and by many misrepresentations of facts, we were married. When Hilda's elopement was discovered, her brothers wasted much time in following a false clue, which I had prepared with her maid's assistance and that of her sister, who was living in Munich. The brothers after some delay became aware of this, but notwithstanding their utmost efforts they only reached London a week after we had changed our name to Smith

and started for Sicily. We settled at Girgenti, and I occupied myself in sketching and painting the ruins of the Greek temples, which pictures I sold readily at high prices to the American and other tourists. If perfect bliss is ever realized on earth we enjoyed it for five years. The one faint foreboding which sometimes crossed my thoughts was caused by the remembrance of Otto Swatzhof's threats to kill me.

"The only articles of value which we possessed were some jewels which my wife had inherited from her mother, and these had been given to her by her brothers when she attained her eighteenth year (for both parents died before she was ten years old), and as her maid Lisa had charge of them there was no difficulty in carrying them with her when we left Paris. For the simple life we led at Girgenti we had ample means from the sale of my paintings and the money my father gave me before I left Munich; but when our daughter was born, we began to save, and we determined to sell the costly jewels some day to increase her dowry.

"The blow I sometimes feared fell when we had lived five years in Sicily. A shadow on my painting and a slight sound behind me caused me to look round—to meet Otto Swatzhof with a revolver pointed at my head.

"‘At last!’ he shouted.

"Before he ceased speaking I rushed towards him to knock the weapon from his hand; but a figure sprang between us, and then I heard Hilda's cry as she fell, shot to the ground. The voice of her brother had brought her to die for me. A second shot laid me senseless, and I remember nothing more. All that followed has been told me at different times by various persons, when I recovered the memory of a former life.

"We were found on the evening of the same day on which Otto committed his murder. Hilda had been dead for hours, but I still breathed, though unconscious. Brigands were supposed to be the authors of the outrage. The Franciscan monastery being the nearest habitation, we were carried to one of the outbuildings.

"In the course of a year I recovered sufficiently from the wound in my head to become a lay brother; then after a probation of six months I accepted the monk's habit and vows, and rose gradually in a year or two to the next in rank to the prior, a fever having killed ten of our number.

"You will hardly believe me, Marco, when I assure you that my memory of this part of my life is blank. I cannot recall a single incident, but I have been told that no brother was more loved and respected than I was, or more self-sacrificing for the good of the community. My repute grew as years passed ; then I was transferred to Terti, and when the superior died I was elected to be the head, and the holy father congratulated the brotherhood on having a man to govern them who was so 'spiritually minded' and of more than average ability.

"Three years ago I was attacked by malarial fever, and when I regained consciousness after the delirium left me, I was utterly at a loss to understand where and what I was ; for weeks I lay silent on my mattress, carefully tended by the brothers, and trying to understand what had happened to me. My nurses thought weakness caused my comatose state. Brother Anthony was especially ordered to wait on me, and from him by degrees I learnt my own history, when I became able to collect my thoughts and ask questions. No doubt I was considered still delirious, and to pacify me all my inquiries were answered. Then my mental agony became almost unbearable, but having lost my dearest treasure, I determined to accept my position and work out Hilda's and my own redemption.

"When able to travel I started for Rome, to place myself in the hands of the head of our Church. I told him all the events of my past life, and he said that it was 'the will of the Almighty to make a sinner into a saint, and he would not hinder by a word the work begun ;' then he blessed me, and I obtained permission to visit Girgenti. It was not till I wandered among the ruins that my memory fully returned, and I remembered my little daughter.

"Where was she? What had become of her? Had Otto carried her away? Had she died among the ruins?

"No inquiries threw light on the subject—not a soul in the town could even recollect the child, and I was forbidden to betray my identity.

"I ascertained from the imperfectly kept burial documents of Girgenti that my Hilda had been buried as an unknown stranger in a common grave with others.

"I returned here a broken-down wreck of a man, but accepted my punishment, and for the last year have felt more resigned ; but a strange incident which occurred last month has renewed

my grief, and I beseech you, Marco, to help me. I had heard you were one of the well-known firm of Innocenti, and that the valuation of works of art was usually left to you; therefore, with an introduction from Cardinal Antonelli, I wrote to your head partner hoping you would be sent to Tertti, but it was not to value our paintings that I wanted you, it was to help me find my little girl. A clue relating to her fell into my hands thus.

"Last November I received a letter from the prior of a monastery in Bavaria, asking me if I could take in for a time an invalid brother of our order: he was the head of a noble Bavarian family, who was in a very bad state of health, and the climate of Italy was considered necessary for his recovery. I consented to accept him for the winter season, and late in the month of November he arrived.

"I saw very little of Brother Damien except at meals, in the refectory, or in chapel three times daily, and should hardly have recognized him outside the walls. One evening, nearly three months after he joined us, I missed some one from the opposite table and inquired which of the monks was ill. My chaplain then informed me he feared the new German brother was very unwell. Would I come and see him and give instructions for his treatment medically?

"I paid a visit to his cell immediately after supper, and found the poor man in a high fever and coughing every moment; he was occasionally delirious and then became conscious for a few moments.

"I stood gazing at him as he lay on his pallet bed, when some muttered words in German caught my ear and I bent over him to listen.

"My movement roused him; he looked up at me with horror in his eyes and exclaimed, as he started up from his bed:

"Am I never to be forgiven? Are the dead always to reproach me? Hilda is constantly near me and now Kohary joins her! It is the devil who sends them! Holy mother, save me!"

"After shouting these words he became so convulsed that we were obliged to hold him down by force—and I recognized in Brother Damien Otto Swatzhof! Though no one in the monastery understood one word of German, I determined to nurse and watch the invalid as much as my numberless duties would allow me, particularly at night.

"The doctor in the village agreed with our brother, the chaplain, who had once been a distinguished surgeon, that the case was hopeless and a month or two would end his life.

"In a few days I won the confidence of my patient, and he related to me during his lucid intervals all the events of his life. He appeared to derive relief from his mental distress in acquainting me with the circumstances which led to the murder of his sister and of her husband (my fear of the consequences prevented me from informing him that he had only killed Hilda). I listened breathlessly when he gave the account of how he seized the child as she was running towards the bodies of her parents, and wrapped her in his cloak, telling Carl to take her in the carriage and wait for him at the small seaport the other side of Girgenti, whilst he visited the apartment of his victims and destroyed all papers which might lead to their identification—he found of course the box of jewels and carried it away with him. After a few weeks a horror of remorse possessed him, and he plunged into every kind of dissipation, till his health became so shattered that his life was a burden to him; then he sought peace in the cloister and after a time was sent to die at Terri.

"The child he had placed in a convent, but he had retained the jewels in his possession safely packed in a leather roll which he had brought with him, intending to place it in the superior's charge as a trust to be used for the benefit of his niece whenever his death should take place. I inquired where he had deposited the jewels. He seemed to wander a little, then answered:

"The superior has them. They are safe."

"Where did you place the child?" was my next question.

"When I die the address of the convent will be found in my legacy to the superior," he answered faintly as he closed his eyes, and presently sank into a disturbed sleep, then I returned to my apartments, leaving the charge of the patient to Brother Anthony.

"I threw myself on my bed, intending to rest for an hour or so but I slept nearly the whole day and no one would disturb me; when at last I awoke and found our chaplain watching me, I knew that Otto's spirit had departed. He died very peacefully, I was told, from exhaustion. I ordered the body to be placed in a coffin and taken to the chapel. Otto was the last of the elder branch, and the title and estates have gone to the next of kin, a distant cousin. I saw him when he came here to take Otto's remains

to Munich for burial in the monastery chapel cloister. Now, Marco, I have told you all. I have not yet discovered the packet of jewels or the address of the convent where the child is living, but I cannot imagine, I dare not think, that there is no packet—that the tale I listened to is untrue, or the wandering delirious imaginations of a sick man.”

It was painful to watch the superior's growing excitement as he related the events of his life, and as he paced up and down or halted before me, his eyes gleaming wildly, I could not prevent the thought crossing my mind that the story was partly imaginary, and that he had never recovered the full possession of his reason since his last attack of fever. I soothed him with promises to aid him, and when he quietly returned to his seat I began to question him on the subject of the Baron Otto's life in the monastery, and the possibility of his being able to hide the jewels; and inquired what search he had made to find them: then I ascertained that all the unused cells were locked and the keys in the superior's charge, but with the exception of these it was possible for an inmate of the monastery to visit every chamber or building in it, if he carefully watched his opportunity.

“Could he enter this room?” I inquired.

“I think that would be impossible,” said the superior, “as when I am away either my chaplain or Brother Anthony would take charge of it. All the papers and deeds connected with the monastery are kept in the suite of rooms next this, to which there is access through my little oratory, the other entrance in the ante-chamber being always locked; they are set apart for the summer retreat of the cardinals, or for any ecclesiastic who brings a letter of introduction from one of them. In the earlier days of this century the sovereign pontiffs came on a visit of a few days, but no one has inhabited them since last autumn, when Cardinal Antonelli was here. I will show you over them to-morrow when we make the tour of the buildings, which I hope you will do, with the view to discover the hidden trust. It is almost midnight, and you are doubtless ready to go to bed.”

With these words the superior lighted the little oil lamp of earthenware placed on the table, and accompanied me to my rooms, in which was burning a light hanging from the centre of the ceiling by long chains. We bade each other good-night, and I watched the tall figure cross the cloisters and enter the chapel;

then I shut my door, found my writing case, and began a letter to my partners informing them of my safe arrival at Terti, and promising full particulars in a day or two ; but before I could end it sleep overcame me, and after a vain effort to rouse myself I gave in, threw myself half-dressed on my bed, where I soon fell into a deep slumber.

A cold wind on my face woke me in the morning, a gleam of sunshine fell across the floor from the loggia, and I saw it must be nearly five o'clock. Rising to look at my watch I became aware that the outer door was wide open, which had certainly been shut the previous night. As I crossed over to close it I heard the sound of uncertain footsteps slowly pacing along, but on looking out into the passage no one could be seen. I advanced a pace or two in the direction of the chapel, but the steps ceased at once, to be again perceptible as I turned back. Puzzled, I followed the sounds past my rooms to the end of the passage wall, and saw a very narrow, steep stone staircase, up which, it appeared to me, the footsteps were ascending with difficulty. Climbing to the top, I entered a narrow, low, vaulted corridor with doors on one side, all closed except the last, which was wide open. Looking in I saw a small whitewashed cell with a wooden bedstead ; on the end of this had been thrown the brown habit of a Franciscan monk, but it had fallen on the floor. Some impulse I cannot even now understand, induced me to lift and replace it, but the weight of the garment was unusual, and I began to examine it to ascertain the cause, and found a hard substance sewn into the seam where the hood joined the collar. I opened my knife and cut the stitches, and then a key fell into my hand ; it was very antique, and the handle richly worked and gilt. At that moment the chapel bell commenced to ring for prayers, and I placed it in my vest pocket, and determined to go back the way I had come ; but as I passed through the narrow door the footsteps fell distinctly on my ear, and I seemed impelled to follow them through countless small chambers ; probably they had formerly served for the servants of the guests ; now they seemed to be used as a passage from one part of the monastery to the other. I came out at last on the landing of a broad oak staircase ; down this I ran and met the superior just coming out of his ante-room.

"Why, you are early, Marco," he said, "and not quite dressed

either. How did you reach this part of the building? Are you coming to chapel? No. Well, will you wait in my rooms? I shall not be long."

I shook my head, and told him I could not at present explain my appearance, but after prayers would do so. He went on quickly, and I retraced my steps; the door of the cell into which I had intruded was shut and locked! In a few moments my toilet engaged my whole attention, and as no footsteps had been heard since my meeting with the superior, I began to persuade myself the echoes of my own steps in the vaulted narrow corridors had caused the sound. In about half-an-hour Brother Anthony came to call me for the first meal of the day, and as we walked together I inquired if he thought the reverend father was quite as strong and well as before his illness.

"Alas, no!" he said. "The father never spares himself or rests; he is the servant of the whole country round, who love and reverence him as a saint, and trouble him too often about their temporal as well as spiritual affairs. Will the signor persuade him to take a little more rest?"

By this time we had reached the ante-room, and hearing our voices the superior came to the door, and told me coffee was ready if I preferred that to the wine of the country. As both were brought for me, and a roll of rye bread to eat with either, I accepted the coffee; then sat down in the old leather chair and related my experience of the morning. The superior listened attentively, then said:

"You only relate the same story I have heard many times lately from my chaplain, Father Antoine, and from the brothers who have their dormitories in the same part of the monastery buildings in which Otto Swatzhof died. They have seen a figure walk in the upper corridor and enter his cell; but on approaching it the door has always been found locked. You have no doubt heard the belief so widely spread, that if a monk dies at Tertti burdened by an unrevealed secret, his spirit haunts the place, and endeavours to give a clue that will lead to its discovery. I thought at first, when the accounts of these sounds and appearances were given to me, that the brothers, being aware that brother Damien died without absolution, imagined a spirit in every flickering shadow caused by their lamps, or by the sunbeams penetrating into the long stone passages; but you knew

nothing of these details, and yet the footsteps drew you into the cell once inhabited by the deceased monk. I locked the door myself, and no habit was left there ; nothing except the wooden bedstead. It appears to me that you are the instrument chosen to show us where the jewels have been placed. Let me see the key you cut from the collar of the monk's habit."

I handed over the key, which he examined, saying :

"I know it well ; it opens the cabinet in the cardinal's rooms, which I can enter through my oratory as well as from the ante-room ; but I have never missed the key, though I am frequently in those apartments. Come with me there at once."

We rose and passed into the suite of rooms through the little oratory. The first we entered had a large carved bedstead in the centre, the faded hangings of which were of red and yellow silk, embroidered with the papal tiara, keys, and other emblems. At the side of the bed stood an ebony cabinet inlaid with ivory.

"We keep nothing in this but relics of our visitors ; a night sock of Pio Nono is our most valuable treasure. Every article left behind by a guest is placed in the cabinet till it is inquired for. But the key is still in the lock, as it always has been !"

Advancing while speaking, the superior tried to unlock the door, but the key came out in his hand ; it was too small, and had been wedged in with paper. It was something like the one I held, but the handle was painted yellow, not gilt. When I tried mine in the lock it fitted exactly and opened the door directly. We both felt anxious and excited ; but nothing could be seen in this division of the cabinet but a mass of trifles, consisting of letters, bills, papers, old missals and devotional books of all sizes and shapes, torn lace chalice veils and embroidered maniples. We pulled out all these things and threw them on the bed ; there was not a trace of the jewels or parcel of any kind. Then my experience as a *bric-à-brac* dealer suggested a search for a secret well or panel. Doubtless, in the Swatzhof palace in Munich many antique cabinets were preserved, and Otto was well acquainted with these hiding-places of a former age, which were all constructed in much the same manner. Feeling carefully round the inside, I touched a knob at the side and pressing it, part of a panel fell forward, disclosing on the shelf a thick leather roll. Seizing it, I handed it to the superior, exclaiming :

"Be happy, Kohary! In this is the clue which will lead you to your daughter. I know her dowry is not your first thought."

"Thank God!" he replied; "I can at last hope that my crimes of the past are forgiven by Him, and that those I have injured, though no longer on earth, have accepted my entreaties for pardon. Otto was ignorant that I still lived, but an Almighty power brought him here to die in my charge, and induced him to entrust to me the care and fortunes of the child he stole. You, too, Marco, are the instrument used to place in my hands the information I despaired of ever finding. Come with me to my room. We will examine the trust together."

The thick leather packet was addressed to Father Clement, the superior of the Terzi Monastery. On opening the first fold of the roll, we came to a letter written by Otto Swatzhof, which briefly entreated the superior to accept the guardianship of an unfortunate child whose parents were dead, and who had no relations, and only one friend—himself. The jewels and clothes were his property, and formed the only provision he could make for her future; and, as he felt his life could not last much longer, he gave them absolutely to the reverend father as a secret trust to be used for the benefit of the girl Carmina Nulla, who had been living for the last ten years in the Convent of the Visitation at Bologna. If it was ascertained within a year or two that she had no vocation for the life of a recluse, the prioress would allow her to leave at the request of the bearer of the inclosed order, as had been agreed when she entered, provided all expenses incurred on her account were defrayed.

When the name Carmina Nulla was read, I uttered an exclamation of surprise, and told the superior she was a youthful acquaintance of mine, and the little friend of Signorina Innocenti, who was a boarder also at the same establishment. We sat silent for some moments, thinking over the strange circumstances disclosed to us; then turned to examine the jewels with the inventory. The most valuable article mentioned was a diamond necklace of single stones; it was impossible to fix any price for it. There were also rings and bracelets, and all the jewellery necessary for a lady belonging to the court circle of Bavaria. Presently, with a deep sigh, the superior swept all the articles scattered over the table into a heap, and began to ask me countless questions about his daughter. What colour were her

eyes? Her hair? How tall was she? He was anxious to hear every minute particular that I could remember. We were at that moment disturbed by a messenger from Rome, who came to tell me Signor Innocenti had been taken suddenly ill; would I return directly?

All was hurry and excitement after I received this summons. Packing up my bag, I sent it on by the servant, and then went to the superior to say farewell. He looked pale and wan, but spoke cheerfully of the future, and of some day meeting Carmina, though he knew the relationship between them could never be acknowledged. He gave over to me the jewels and letter to the head of the convent at Bologna, but burnt all the papers, including Otto's will, and placed everything without reserve in my hands. I was to adopt Carmina, and keep the secret of the trust, acting as I thought best in regard to the sale of the jewels and investments of the proceeds for her benefit. With tears in our eyes we embraced and parted.

On reaching Rome I heard our chief was seriously ill with an attack of cholera. The visit of his daughter and her little friend had been postponed. For the next week I was so occupied with my double duties at the office that I hardly thought of Terti, and was overwhelmed with grief when, six days after, Brother Anthony came to acquaint me with the death of his beloved superior. He had fainted one morning at prayers, and died in the evening. He had charged the faithful old monk to bring me his crucifix as a remembrance.

With the passing away of my old comrade my story ends, but some reader may wish to know how I fulfilled the trust I accepted fifteen years ago. Look with me, all who care to see, into the garden of a Swiss *châlet*, where we always spend our autumn together. Carmina is running races with her two eldest boys, while her husband, Bruno Innocenti, tosses his youngest in a swing. On the marriage of my adopted daughter with our junior partner, I settled on her a large dowry and the Swiss *châlet*.

The secret of the trust has never been suspected; but some of our Roman friends smile when allusion is made to my liberality. Others say it was only the eccentric act of a mad Englishman, who acted on impulse, without having any particular reason
au fond.

A. OMAN.

A Point of Conscience.

By STELLA M. DÜRING.

PROLOGUE.

THE river was "out" at Cumbledon, to use the nervous phrase of the country folks round. All the low-lying meadows along its banks were one swirling, rushing, seething mass of turbid, brown water. The melancholy trees stood waist high in it, dipping their lower branches and bringing them out again laden with trailing river-weed and straw and hay from the flooded farm-yards. A shrieking, wild October day it was, with occasional showers of cold rain coming down from the leaden sky in slanting whitish lines and the withered leaves scudding gaily on the wind.

There were not many people about. The village folks were either too apathetic or too busy to care to come down to the riverside through the rain, even though the news that Cumbledon bridge was in danger had reached them an hour ago. One or two labourers in their picturesque white smocks, one or two farmers, stolid and fatalistic, and a young man on horseback who happened to be an engineer, and who had first warned them of what would assuredly happen should the pressure of water on the piers continue, stood about at either side, but there was no crowd and no excitement.

Cumbledon bridge was built of stone, a handsome, heavy, lengthy structure, at whose many apparently superfluous arches the traveller, who saw the dwindled river only in the summer was apt to stare in some astonishment. But many though the arches were, and wide as was their span, the angry water to-day sought a passage in vain. The umber-coloured billows mounted moment by moment higher and higher against the broad stone-work of the parapet and it shivered again under their weight.

Some hundred yards along the lane leading steeply up from the water's edge was a house, deeply buried in trees and enclosed by a high wall. An old stone horse-block stood near the handsome gates and on the mossy horse-block stood a woman, a young, slender, graceful woman, as even her enveloping grey wrap could not quite conceal. She was watching with vivid and eager interest the little group of men down by the doomed bridge, and so absorbed was she that she never heard the dull thud of a horse's hoof in the damp lane behind her, was unaware

of the approaching horseman till he was close upon her. Then she turned and looked at him, one full, straight look. He saw a delicate, beautiful head, gleaming jewel-like from its setting of cloudy grey; and she, a powerfully built man of about middle height, whose dark, stern face had been what women call "divinely handsome," before it was seamed and lined by a trouble that had set its cruel mark there all too plainly.

What was it gleamed across those two faces, pale in the livid light of the long, yellow cloudbreak before them? Startled recognition—passionate gladness—fear—horror? The woman sprang down from the stone and with a sharp cry held out both her arms.

"Robert!" she said, her voice low, clear, thrilling—"Robert!"

And he? He turned his head away in stern and cruel wrath, his eyelids lowered coldly over his angry, mournful eyes, his loose reins tightened in his hand and, at a sharp touch from his spur, his horse sprang away down the stony, muddy lane as though he too would put all the distance possible between his master and the eager, outstretched hands of that woman standing in the road, her sunny hair all blown back from her face, her soft, grey draperies floating on the wild, wet wind.

Perhaps, had it not been for that startling recognition, he might have noticed the faces of the men as he passed them at the foot of the bridge, have heard the warning shout as his horse dashed on. He heard nothing but that one wild cry, "Robert! Oh, Robert!"

She had followed him. He set his teeth hard below his sweeping moustache.

"How *dare* she!" he muttered, half aloud.

His horse gained the centre of the bridge, it was the last straw. Suddenly he felt the ground rock and shiver beneath the animal's feet, and realizing the danger too late, threw him sharply back on his haunches. There was a confused shouting from the group of men behind and before him. He drew his feet from his stirrups in that momentary pause. No one could reach him, he stood there alone not many feet from perfect safety. Then came a yawning crack in the roadway to one side of him, a heaving, settling forward plunge of the ground on which he stood, a rushing roar of sliding masonry and whirling water, and man and horse were thrown far into the eddying, creaming, brown river.

The search was kept up far into the night, but that luckless horseman and his horse were never seen again.

"I be shure he be dead, I be!" said one drawling rustic, peering with troubled eyes into the turbid flood ere he again cast his primitive, three-pointed drag. "He be ander the stoans, he be, I'm shure!"

The young engineer who had seen the catastrophe did not contradict his idea—it was only too likely.

"Did you see who it was, Baggetts?" he asked quietly.

"No!" said Baggetts, a gleam of intelligence playing over his bovine countenance. "Was he bekknown to you, sur?"

"Yes, a little! It was young Squire Mansfield, from over Cassiter Hill."

"No, for shure!" said Baggetts. "Well, he be ander the stoans, he be! or we'd 'a 'lighted on him bevor now, we s'uld!"

"Yes!" said his companion, with quiet conviction, "we should!"

I.

"I THINK it will be a gay Commemoration!"

"Well, you see, when Royalty honours us with a visit the least we can do is our best to entertain them."

It was Show Sunday. Year after year we are told that the promenade in the Broad Walk is nothing to what it used to be. If the quality of that time-honoured ceremonial has deteriorated as steadily as is represented, it is by this time in a painful state of decadence. The tall, slight girl, who prophesied so hopefully a gay Commemoration, was, however, fortunately unable to compare the present function with past ones, and to her eager, interested eyes the pretty scene wanted nothing. It was a sunny June evening, with just sufficient breeze to show the silver under-sides of the elm leaves and an occasional cloud to throw into pleasant contrast the succeeding bursts of warm, yellow light. But the sunshine was nearly gone now and the ends of the venerable avenue had begun to look indistinct and misty.

"It is getting dark! We shall have to go in!" said the tall girl with a sigh of unmistakeable regret. "Can you see Granny?"

"She is not far off! I saw her and Algy sitting down not a moment ago! But it is early yet to talk of going in! The moon will be up before nine! Can't we wait for her?"

"No, Mr. Meadows, Granny doesn't appreciate the moon!" and Miss Forrester looked at her companion a little curiously as

she smiled at the suggestion. Coming from anyone but Mr. Meadows it would have sounded sentimental, but sentiment and Mr. Meadows were a little hard to reconcile.

"Well, we will look for Mrs. Forrester as we come down again! After all this is not a very intellectual observance, is it?" he said, as once again they joined the slow stream of gaily dressed women, gorgeous doctors and undergrads in all the conscious pride of cap and gown. Leslie Forrester opened her eyes a little wider as she looked up at her friend. They were very lovely eyes, soft and clear and darkly blue.

"Unintellectual! Is it? Oh, but wouldn't you be sorry to see it done away with?" leaving the disagreeable main question for a side issue at a bound, as a woman will.

"Are you a Conservative, Miss Forrester?"

"Yes, are not you?"

"In all things?"

"I hope so!" with unmistakeable decision.

"One of those happy people to whom whatever is, is right?" —with a tinge of bitterness.

"No, Mr. Meadows! — but — I would rather be one to whom whatever is — is right, than one to whom whatever is — is wrong?"

"Keep your belief in the world, Leslie! — or, at any rate, don't let me shake it."

He spoke after a slight pause and in the tone Leslie least liked to hear — the tone that reminded her most forcibly of his seniority which was considerable — the tone that seemed almost to reduce to an absurdity the idea of friendship between them, a friendship she had secretly begun to regard as her proudest possession.

"Oh, there is Algy! — and Granny — and that dreadful lisping Mr. Donnisthorpe and three or four others! We shall have to go in, Mr. Meadows. Will you come too?"

"No, thank you, not to-night! I am a little too old for Algy's friends. Where are you staying?"

"In the High. Almost opposite St. Mary's. *Won't* you come in?"

"No, thank you, dear, not to-night."

Leslie's heart sprang at the little unconscious, caressing word and then sank again — it was only because he was so much older.

"What are your plans for to-morrow?" she asked. "We have none, except, of course, the boat procession in the evening. Algy will be in his glory. You will come and see him?"

Mr. Meadows smiled a little mournfully at the girl's frank anxiety.

"I shall find you on the Magdalen barge?"

His eyes rested on her face with gentle gravity, and something in them gave Leslie a slight shock. Then he greeted Algy's friends a little stiffly and grandmama a little awkwardly—he was never quite at his ease with grandmama—and went. Miss Forrester watched him thread his way in and out of the crowd till the varying groups of men and girls hid his broad shoulders and well-set head from sight, and then with an effort brought her wandering attention to bear on Mr. Donnisthorpe's airy nothings.

"Tho glad that Algy hath been tho thuccethful!—aw—he detherth it—aw—more than any fellah I know!—aw—wath quite afraid he'd do too much, you know!—overtrain—and that thort of thing! but he lookth well, don't you think tho?"

Mr. Donnisthorpe had found out some time ago that the surest way to hold the attention of Algy's pretty sister was to talk about Algy himself. But his well-meant efforts hardly met to-night with the success they deserved. Leslie's mind flew at once not to Algy's proud position at the head of the river, but to his position on the recent examination list, which was not by any means so enviable.

"Do you think he *has* overworked himself?" she asked anxiously. "Perhaps that accounts for his not—doing better!"

Mr. Donnisthorpe opened his mild blue eyes and stared. How could any fellow do better than help to place his eight at the head of the river? Glorious distinction! What was any honour Alma Mater could bestow compared with that? With a sudden smile Leslie realized their different standpoints.

"His eight!—oh, yes—I forgot!"—Mr. Donnisthorpe's surprise lengthened all his face! How could any one forget? "We are going to see the Magdalen boat saluted to-morrow—aren't we?—and so is Mr. Meadows!" she added to herself, to which reflection, had poor Mr. Donnisthorpe only known it, he owed the brilliant smile that made him happy for the remainder of the evening.

II.

"It is a pretty sight!"

So Leslie from the top of Magdalen barge, her white-robed figure drawn to its full height, her pretty hands resting lightly

on the rail before her, her bright face turned in the direction of Iffley, whence the expected eights were surely coming.

It was a pretty sight. Mr. Meadows' eyes took in everything—sparkling water, pretty women, fluttering flags, gaily painted barges, excited, eager undergraduates. He was thirty-five, but it did not seem long since he had been one of them and one amongst the most eager. The strains of one of Strauss' loveliest waltzes came softly over the water from University barge, beside which, his stalwart shoulders decorated with the black and white colours of his college, his manly heart beating madly with excitement, swelling high with pride, sat Algy and his seven brethren in their victorious boat, waiting to receive the homage of their weaker or less fortunate fellows.

"Can you see him?"

Leslie craned her slender neck over the barge side to the manifest danger of her equilibrium. Mr. Meadows' hand came down on hers for a moment and Granny said, "My dear, do be more careful!" with a momentary loss of her usual tranquillity.

"You can see him if you stand up here!"—and as he spoke Mr. Meadows stepped lightly on to a bench and gave Leslie his hand. "See! here comes the first eight!"—a muffled roar from the serried ranks of citizens on the towing path emphasized his words.

"When my little lad is old enough he shall go to Magdalen! I was there, you know!"

Leslie's eyes darkened slightly with surprise. She had never heard of his little lad before!

"Where is he now?" she asked softly.

"At Eton! he is only nine, poor little chap! I should like to take you down there to see him some day! Would you go, Leslie?"

His voice was quiet, his manner almost cold, but Leslie felt all that was meant by that simple little question, and so did grandmama, who was not as comfortably out of earshot as Mr. Meadows imagined. That quiet little question!—how it thrilled both his hearers!—Leslie with the soft delicious certainty of what she had suspected more than once or twice lately, grandmama with the disagreeable conviction that she really knew very little of Mr. Meadows, far too little to render it in any way desirable that he should make love to Leslie. Grandmama was half inclined to think she had been a little remiss in her guardianship—a little mistaken, perhaps, in being the most vigilant of duennas

where Algy's boyish friends were concerned, and seeing no danger in the companionship of a "really very delightful" man like Mr. Meadows, simply because he happened to be fifteen years the girl's senior. And her knowledge of this man extended only as far as this—that he was very nice-looking, that he had, as far as appearances went, any amount of money, that his manners were irreproachable, and, thanks to the sharpness of her ears this afternoon, that he had a little boy at Eton! Grandmama resolved to extend her knowledge forthwith. Accordingly when the first vivid interest in the saluting crews had evaporated and Leslie and Mr. Meadows stepped down from their perch, she saluted him with the gentle and leading query, "Is your little boy happy at school, then, Mr. Meadows?" a question, to judge by his blank face, that evidently took him a good deal aback.

"Yes, thank you, Mrs. Forrester, he is quite happy!"

"Is he your only child?" continued grandmama sweetly.

"Yes, my only one!"

"Dear me! your wife must be a little lonely—isn't she—with you away and her little boy at school?" It was a bold stroke. Grandmama quite complimented herself on her diplomacy. After all she was not quite sure there *was* no Mrs. Meadows! Mr. Meadows evidently did not like his catechism. His face darkened, and when he answered it was with some hesitation.

"I have no wife, Mrs. Forrester!"

Grandmama was nothing daunted, and very much relieved.

"Really! Then you are a widower—how sad! You see, you never mentioned it until this afternoon, and of course we did not like to ask——!"

If Mr. Meadows' face had been dark before, it blackened now. He turned and faced grandmama suddenly, stopped her in the middle of her gentle commiserations.

"I did not *say* that I was a widower, madam!" and then he stared moodily across the rippling river and plainly declined to gratify any more undue curiosity.

Leslie, leaning lightly on the rail before her, her eyes on the glittering waterway, was simply puzzled. Grandmama began to fan herself a little hurriedly, and the movements of her fan betrayed excitement, consternation, and as much anger as the gentle, old lady was capable of feeling. Really it was very shocking—very! Of course she knew that that sort of thing

did happen, but he need not have sent the unfortunate little fellow to Eton—that was in grandmama's eyes his crowning sin. And of course his regrettable intimacy with Leslie must be broken off at once, on that point there could be no hesitation. The pity was that if any one suffered through her culpable want of foresight and care, it would probably be Leslie, and Leslie was hardly the kind of girl to suffer quietly. If that dangerous man had made the impression grandmama half suspected, there would be trouble in the near future for her.

The show was over, the homage paid. A score of vigorous young fellows in flannels were disporting themselves like fishes in the water to the huge amusement of the citizens, and young and old, gentle and simple, were turning their faces homewards when grandmama awoke from her perplexed reverie to find Leslie cordially inviting her objectionable cavalier to tea. Grandmama interfered, and her interference was a little too hurried to be quite politic.

"My dear, remember that Mrs. Alwyn calls for you at seven this evening."

"To take me to the ball at Magdalen! Yes, Granny dear, that is exactly it! Mr. Meadows is going, and she may just as well take him too!"

Granny's pretty old face plainly expressed her disapproval. Really Leslie's frank encouragement of her unwelcome suitor was most unfortunate! It had never struck her before as it struck her now! Mr. Meadows was a very sensitive man, and he only looked once at grandmama.

"Thank you very much, Miss Forrester, but I have an engagement! I will come if possible to-night"—hurried irresistibly forward by the frank disappointment in Leslie's eyes—"but if I am not there you will know I have been detained, and I shall see you at the flower show to-morrow—Trinity, isn't it? You will be there?"

"Oh, yes! Well, good-bye, Mr. Meadows, till to-morrow!"

And three people during the next five minutes made resolutions with a decision that bordered on obstinacy. "I am afraid Granny does not like Mr. Meadows as much as she did!" mused Leslie, "and I like him better! If he asks me to go down to Eton again, I think I shall go!" "I must speak to Leslie to-night!" decided grandmama, "this must be put a stop to at once. She must on no account go down to Eton with Mr. Meadows!"

"There is nothing for it now but to speak out!" said Mr. Meadows to himself, as he walked steadily up the straight avenue of young poplars and beeches, with the crowded riverside behind him and the beautiful archway of the new buildings in front—and he hardly looked as if the prospect of speaking out afforded him unmixed satisfaction.

III.

IT was night. The soft, summer moon and faint, white stars looked down upon the gardens of Magdalen College, upon the sleeping flower-beds in their unwonted setting of jewel-like lamps, on the soft, grey front of the old buildings and the harsher tones of the new, on Leslie in her clinging white robes, and on her dark-faced cavalier as they paced soberly up and down the flagged terrace.

The hush and the flower-scented dusk were pleasant after the heated ball-room, with its crowds of laughing, happy-faced youths and maidens. Leslie's pulses were beating evenly and happily. It was good to be young, to be alive, to be walking in the clear half-dark with her hand on Robert Meadows' arm, conscious of little beside the pleasure of her friendship and the presence of her friend. Grandmama had had not a moment in which she could cloud her perfect confidence in him by giving utterance to her new-born misgivings. No note of mistrust or suspicion marred the perfect harmony of the girl's own consciousness. If he were only not quite so silent, *quite* so grave!

A handsome, smiling lad, followed by two or three of his friends, dashed through the narrow arched passage on to the terrace.

"He is looking for me!" said Leslie, a faint note of regret in her voice. They were on the gravelled walk at the lower end of the garden. The small, iron gate leading into Addison's Walk was open and not a yard away. Leslie felt her hand held jealously within the strong arm on which it rested, and the next moment the moonlight fell on her bare head through a screen of quivering leaves; they had turned into the Walk.

On and on they walked through the flickering light and shadow. Leslie's heart began to beat and her pulses to thrill with a vague, sweet, terrible trouble born of the sighing of the trees and the ripple of the water, the delicious hush of the night and the thought-charged silence of her companion. They had left the one or two scattered smokers far in the rear. The soft,

beamy vista stretched to eternity before and behind them when, with swift, intuitive dread of the approaching crisis, Leslie hesitated and paused. Meadows looked straight into her eyes.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

"No, not with you!"—in an oppressed whisper—"it is only the silence!"

"If you will sit down there," indicating a bench where the path makes an abrupt turn. "I have plenty to say! Will you hear it?"

"Surely"—with sweetest gravity.

Leslie felt the effort with which he had spoken through every nerve of her body. What was she to hear? What was he bracing his mind to tell her? Not only that he loved her. Leslie felt now that she had known that from the first. That would not cloud his brow and harden his mouth. And it was not, it could not be, doubt of her feeling for him that brought that agony of uncertainty into his eyes. Leslie laid her hand gently on his arm, and as she raised her questioning eyes to his—that her heart, in the pure pride of its maidenly devotion, lay bare to him, was nothing to her—his trouble—it was trouble—all!

But Leslie's eyes were too much for him. He had hardly dared to hope the half of what they told him, and the sudden certainty scattered all his self-command. In another instant the girl lay trembling in his arms, his dark cheek pressed to hers, and for one bewildering moment past and present, time and eternity, ceased to exist for those two.

"You knew," he breathed.

"I guessed—a little!"

"And you don't mind?"

"Mind what?"

"A plain-looking, middle-aged man with a little boy at Eton?"

"Not when he is—you!" with a laugh that was dangerously near tears. And then they kissed each other, and Leslie drew herself away from his arm and wrapped her burnous about her, for she shivered slightly, though the night was warm, and looked out with wonder in her eyes at life under the changed conditions that the last few moments had brought.

The clock in the Cardinal's Tower, rising tall and majestic in the distance, rang out ten musical strokes. The moon turned the periwinkle leaves that bordered the path to sprays of frosted silver, and powdered Leslie's hair and lent an added radiance to

her face. Mr. Meadows passed his hand lightly over the soft ripples of that hair, and the shadow crept back into his eyes again. He had not said all he had to say yet, and how would it be afterwards? Might he lose her even now? The scent of the white roses Leslie wore floated about him; the pretty head came back to his shoulder like a bird to its nest. He thought of her strict training, of the scrupulous, almost stern, conscientiousness he had marvelled at and worshipped. How would it be with him afterwards?

"You knew that I had been married, Leslie?"

"Yes, there is the little boy, you know."

"It is that I wish to speak about. I have something to tell you. My wife was a very beautiful woman. When we were first married I loved her devotedly, but—it is hard to tell, Leslie!"

It was hard to tell, hard to rake up the five-years-buried bitterness that turned his blood to flame as he recalled it, hard to render neither more nor less than justice to the woman who had shadowed his life. Leslie slipped her hand into his and forbore to look at his face.

"She was not a good woman. I cannot explain further, dear. Perhaps if she had cared for me, if I had been a little more gentle, more patient, things might have been different. But I'm afraid I was harsh with her, and she did not love me well enough to care to alter. After Ted was born she went to the bad altogether."

"Poor thing!" said Leslie softly.

To possess his love, and lose it; to owe him wifely duty, and fail; she might well say, "Poor thing!"

"I was to blame," Meadows went on, his deep voice a little roughened. "I left her too much to herself. She—home was hateful to me—I was never there when I could avoid it. Naturally before long it grew hateful to her too! She—went away and left me."

He told his story with almost painful simplicity. Leslie did not fully comprehend the significance of the bald little sentence that held the tragedy of his life.

"And did you—find her again?"

"There was no need to look for her. She made no secret of where she was!"

"What did you do?"

"I got a divorce!"

A thrill passed right through Leslie. Now she understood.

Meadows bent his head on his hand and went on moodily, his eyes turned away from the sweet embodied sympathy beside him.

"I hoped he would marry her, but he didn't, the hound! He left her—abroad—in poverty. Then she came back to me."

The soft hand in his tightened its hold of his strong fingers. He raised it to his lips and went on with his story.

"I—provided for her. After all she had been my wife and I could do no less. But I would not see her. I don't think she expected it—or wished it. It was more than I could do."

"And did you never see her again?"

"Yes, once. I was riding and she spoke to me. I did a cowardly thing that day, Leslie."

"No!" said Leslie, with entire conviction.

"Yes, I did. I hated her, I hated myself—everybody. I was a marked man, pitied or at least noticed by every one. I wished I was dead and out of it all. There was an accident. Part of a bridge gave way as I rode over it. I was thrown into the water, and every one thought I was drowned. I've let them think so ever since."

"And your property?" Leslie asked, after she had mastered her astonishment.

"It is saving up for the little lad, I expect. I had plenty of money, as it happened, in my own hands. There was no difficulty. I shall have to come to life again some day, I suppose"—with a moody smile—"I feel as if I'd been rather a fool now, but the temptation was strong. It seemed as if I could leave my follies and wrongs, with my identity and my name, at the bottom of the river."

"Then you are not——!"

"Yes, I am! Robert Meadows Mansfield, with all his troubles on his head again. O, Leslie! my little Leslie! this has made no difference to you. You don't take your hand away; your eyes still meet mine. If you knew how I have dreaded this moment, how I have wondered whether she—that woman who was once my wife—would still have the power to strip my life of all that is good——"

He was growing a little incoherent in the relief from his long fear. Leslie slipped a hand about his neck and checked him.

"And is it any reason, that you have been unhappy, why I should not love you?"

"Then you will marry me, Leslie? no superstitious scruple, no strained point of conscience need stand between us?"

Leslie smiled up into his pale, moved face.

"What should? Did you think I should be afraid to marry a man who has been—drowned. Oh, Robert," she whispered, as he held her close to his heart, "God is so good, we are so happy, you and I. Let us think kindly of all the world, even of the poor, unhappy woman who married you. Think what she must have suffered—the more wicked she was, the worse it would be—for her. Oh! she must have suffered bitterly—before she died."

A shock passed through Meadows' whole frame. "Before she died." Was it possible that the frail bark of his hopes was still among the shoals and quicksands! Had he rejoiced, even though it was with trembling, too soon?

"Leslie!" he said—and his voice was hoarse and his lips were cold—"did you think she was dead?"

"Is she *not* dead?"

"No!" he said curtly.

"Oh the little more and how much it is,
And the little less and what miles away."

They had not moved—his arms were still about her, her head still rested on his breast. But was this Leslie?—this pale, wide-eyed woman with the interlocked fingers and the set white lips? Where was his rosy smiling love of five seconds before?

"Leslie!" he said, laying his cheek on hers that she might not see the suspense in his eyes—whispering that she might not hear the fear in his voice—"She is nothing to us! She was dead to me five years ago! All that is as if it had never been."

"It cannot be, as though it had never been. Your wife—is alive."

"I have no wife!" his voice rising in passionate protest. "She forfeited her claim to that title five years ago. She is nothing to me more than the beggar in the street. I support her as I might support any other woman whose beauty and whose sins appealed to my compassion. Leslie, I am a free man, thank God."

"Not free—to marry again."

A chill sense of defeat and despair settled down over Robert Meadows. This beautiful child in his arms that he could crush as he might a butterfly, so slender, so feminine, so frail—so inflexible where the grim abstraction called Conscience asserted its claims. With a horrible sense of impotence he pleaded his cause again.

"Leslie, think what you are saying. Don't risk my happiness—and your own—if you love me—for the sake of a mistaken idea born of wrong teaching. I am free, in the eyes of God and

man. All law is on my side. Her own act undid the bond that united us. She is no longer any wife of mine. Our marriage is as if it never had been. *You* will be my wife—worshipped, idolized as never wife was yet."

Yes—for the very qualities that would assuredly separate her from him. She clung to him for a moment and then burst into tears.

"Oh, Robert, you will think I don't love you. How can I make you understand that I do when I cannot do what you wish. Don't think me unreasonable, don't think I blame you in any way. You are right, dear, in what you have asked, I know. You are free in the eyes of the law, I know. But for me it would be wrong. That woman, while she lives, would always be your wife. I never should. To others, differently taught, it would be different, but for me it would be a sin. She has cut herself adrift from you—yes, I know. She can claim nothing from you. But as long as she lives nothing can alter the fact that she has been your wife—that she is your wife—till she dies."

Leslie's voice died away. Meadows was intensely still. He spoke after a long pause.

"Leslie, you are only a girl. Your ideas, as you would be the first to acknowledge yourself, are youthful, and you will find occasion to correct and alter many of them. Think, dear, is it not possible that you are mistaken here? Marriages, if, as you say, they are for all time, must also be for all eternity. If nothing can dissolve a marriage here, nothing can dissolve it hereafter. In that case no man should marry again even if his wife were dead."

"That is different," said Leslie quickly.

"Then do you consider that all people who have married divorced men or women are living sinful lives?"

"No, Robert, they feel differently—to them it is right."

"Then have you"—smiling at her with some little bitterness—"a little law all to yourself that shall specially prevent your marrying me?"

The tears dropped thick and fast through Leslie's fingers. That was how she had been afraid he would take it. Oh, it was so difficult to make him understand that, even though she loved him with her whole heart, she could not do this thing. He sprang up from his seat and began to pace rapidly up and down the gravelled space before her. Her position was illogical—ridiculous—but she was terribly in earnest, and, mistaken or no,

that fair, pale girl, over whom his heart yearned through all its rising anger, was capable of setting aside not only his happiness but her own for an abstract conception of duty. How he loved her; even while she sacrificed him for an idea that to his mind was strained—absurd. How different she was! how different!

"Robert!" her eyes were beseeching but her voice was low and steady. He took her hand and listened. "If I were a woman of a different religion from your own, you would bear with me and not insist on my doing anything I thought was wrong. You would be patient with my mistaken ideas!"

"Yes, if they did not happen to separate you from me, I might."

"But if they *did*—if, as is the case, I could not think a thing right—could you not understand?"

He turned away in sudden anger.

"I can understand one thing without any difficulty. You never had any affection for me worthy the name or you could not calmly throw me over for a sentiment in this way. Keep your fetish! you love it better than ever you did me!"

Her eyes followed him in dumb appeal. His anger was terrible to her. He threw himself down beside her and took her in his arms once more.

"Forgive me! I was a brute! I have frightened you! But you hurt me so I hardly knew what I said. If I had asked you to do anything really wrong I could have understood."

Leslie trembled from head to foot, but she had conquered her tears. When she spoke again her voice was faint and weary—it was growing almost too much for her.

"Robert, to me it would be a sin. I have been brought up to think so. To me it would mean no marriage—I should come to you guilty and ashamed. Is it not better to live apart always than to feel that one has done wrong. Oh!"—with a sudden bitter cry as she hid her face on his breast—"don't make it any harder for me! You are a man and stronger than I am; don't let me do what I believe to be wrong for the sake of being happy! Oh, Robert, help me!"

Then the heroism of the man came out. Then was Leslie's love justified. Another prayer and she would have yielded. Meadows set his lips hard, and as he held her against his heart he made his resolve. By no word of his should she be drawn aside from what she believed to be duty. Never would he have to

reproach himself that, through him, even a fancied stain rested on the whiteness of this severe innocence.

"God help us both!" he said huskily—"we will do what is right as far as we see it! Come, Leslie, we must go in."

In silence the Long Walk was retrodden. The wind moaned softly through the tree tops, the moon was setting chilly in a silver haze. In silence they walked down the beautiful High Street; grandmama had needed no second bidding when she saw Leslie's face. The hooded, satin-slipped, merry-faced girls passed and repassed them as she walked under the shadow of the venerable buildings. Leslie looked at them in dull wonder, an hour ago she had been one of them. By St. Mary's beautiful porch Meadows paused. So much he had allowed himself—to come thus far with his lost darling in silence. He could pledge himself to that at least. Now he raised her face in the shade.

"This, then, is good-bye, Leslie!"

Once again they kissed each other and then they crossed and Leslie left him. Grandmama looked after the white figure as it flitted silently up the wide stair with an unusual brightness in her pretty old eyes, and was not surprised to hear that Mr. Meadows would not be at the flower show on the morrow.

"He has told her about the little boy!" decided grandmama as she bade him good-bye with more regret than she had expected to feel. "I might have trusted Leslie."

EPILOGUE.

A YEAR had passed away, and Meadows had kept his resolution of in no way seeking to shake Leslie's decision. A weary, lonely, desolate year it had been. He had gone abroad—that refuge of all the distressed in mind—and had come back a little more melancholy than he went, determined, at least, upon one thing, that he would put an end to the weak-minded silence he had kept as to his whereabouts, and would go back to his home and his duties.

"Neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
Can wholly do away, I ween,
The marks of that which once hath been."

That he felt to the full. But he would no longer be guilty of the cowardly shift of running away from his troubles. He would face them like a man, and live the best life that was possible to him, since the wickedness of one woman and the goodness of another alike made happiness an impossibility.

Once again the brown horse and his rider came down the stony, rutty lane that led to Cumbledon bridge—an impulse that he could not account for leading him past the gates of the woman who had once borne his name. But to-day there was no slender, grey-robed watcher on the mossy horse-block, no appealing cry that should ring in his ears for days. There was no stone bridge either, only a temporary wooden platform supported by barges placed side by side across the stream. And on the wooden structure stood Baggetts, stolidly watching the swirl of the water about the submerged masonry. Baggetts looked up as the horse's hoofs echoed on the bridge, and his jaw dropped suddenly.

"Be you t' squire, or be you t' squire's ghoast?" he found courage to demand, as the substantial nature of his neighbour's horse, at least, was made evident by the swaying and rocking of the woodwork.

"I'm the squire himself, my good fellow!" tossing him half-a-crown by way of collecting his wits; "why shouldn't I be?"

"Loard 'a marcy! How did ye get aart o' th' waarter?" Baggetts was still aghast and tremulous.

"Swam out, of course!" with an irritated laugh. Would all his explanations be as stupidly vexatious?

"Then the stoan be arl a loie!"

"What stone?"

"Th' stoan i' the churchyaard!"

Baggetts pointed up the hill towards the fine old parish church some mile or so away. Meadows turned short away, shook his rein and clattered up the stony road towards it. This was worse than he had expected. Had they really put a stone up to his memory? Awkward as the situation was he could not help smiling; it was not often a man criticised his own monument. He hitched his horse to the lych-gate, and made his way over the graves towards the tall, brand-new, conspicuous monolith that was to keep his memory green in the minds of his fellow men. And this—oh, that wasted year!—this was what he read:

"In grateful and affectionate remembrance of Robert Meadows Mansfield, of Cassiter Hall, who was drowned by the fall of Cumbledon Bridge, Oct. 12th, 1884, this stone is erected by his tenantry.

"Also to the memory of Liliias, his wife, who met her death at the same time by the same accident.

"Requiescat in pace."

"A Rough Awakening."

"From the age of fourteen years women are flattered and worshipped by men. Seeing thus that there is nothing else for them but to serve the pleasure of man, they begin to beautify themselves, and to place all their hopes in this. It were well, then, that they should perceive themselves to be prized for nothing else than modesty and decorum."—*Epictetus*.

It was when we went to see my brother Claude in Milan, after his severe illness, that he told us the following singular, but perfectly true, story.

One lovely evening in September we were all three walking down the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, one of the finest arcades in Europe, when we saw a striking-looking woman approaching.

"By Jove!" said Claude, "if that doesn't look like 'la belle Américaine.' I hope to goodness she hasn't returned to her old haunts."

"Why, who is she?" said I; but there was no time for a reply before we met.

I saw the colour mount to his face, and I looked keenly at the fresh comer. As we passed she shot such a look of deadly hatred at Claude that I did not wonder he looked a trifle discomposed, and even Guy couldn't help saying, "What a striking-looking woman! but what have you done to her, old man?—she looked as if she would like to plant a dagger under one of your ribs, not too far off the heart to be effectual."

And a striking-looking woman she was, tall, fair, with masses of golden hair wound round and round a most shapely head, large, well-opened blue eyes, with just a suspicion of cruelty in their still depths, and the most wonderful complexion I ever saw; yes, I say it advisedly, the most marvellous complexion it has ever been my lot to see.

"She would not only like to stab me, but has tried to perform that feat," replied Claude, with a grim smile.

"That lovely-looking creature! Oh! surely you must be mistaken," I exclaimed.

"Hardly a thing to make a mistake about. But I don't wonder she hates me. I stopped her from being an English viscountess, and no doubt she owes me one for that."

"But how did you manage to prevent it?" I asked.

"Well, it is rather a long story," replied Claude, "and as you are a trifle tired with your sight-seeing—the Ambrosian library

is enough to take it out of any one—suppose we wait till we get back to the Hotel Puzzi, and then you shall have a true account of what I did two years ago. It gained me Miss Lincoln's undying hatred, but a certain Viscount's father and mother bless me for it to this day."

I was not sorry to wait a little for the story, for we had had a very fatiguing day. Claude wanted me to see everything. "I should be so vexed," he said, "when I got back to England, if I did not take advantage of the opportunity we now had of doing Milano thoroughly." So that morning we had gazed for hours at the marvellous missals, the precious curios, the wonderful relics, and the enormous mass of books the grand old library contained.

During dinner I kept wondering what the story could be that Claude was going to tell us; but at last the final course was served, and we were snugly esconced in our sitting-room upstairs, waiting in happiest mood for the tale which was to be unfolded to us.

You know (said Claude), when I came to Milan first I lodged at the Casa Romani, a lovely old palace in the Via Monforte belonging to the Countess Romani. Her husband was dead, and the family very much impoverished, so, to increase her income, she let some of the rooms of the old Casa to about a dozen students who were studying music and painting in the musical city.

Amongst others who had rooms in the Casa Romani was this American, whom we met in the Galleria to-day, and her old nurse, a wizened old body, who might have been any age—perhaps she aged early! Anyhow, Miss Lincoln never went anywhere without her, and seemed to have a kind of animal affection for her chaperon.

Those who lodged with the old Contessa of course looked after their own commissariat, and most of them dined at the Hôtel Puzzi. The manager was very obliging, and did his best to please us, and in time it began to be a recognized thing that little tables in one part of the room were reserved at dinner for the English contingent, which also numbered among its select body several Americans, and a sprinkling of Scotch and Irish who were hoping some day to make name and fortune with their voices.

I am afraid the conversation was often very "shoppy"—who had heard the last opera by Verdi; who was going to sing in the Mass next Sunday at the cathedral; dear old Lamperti's last bon-mots, or crushing opinion of some would-be singer's voice; and

who was going down to Baveno on Saturday, for the next day's service in the lovely little church in the grounds of the Villa Clara.

But we didn't mind being "shoppy;" we were all fond of each other, more or less, and looked forward to our daily meetings at the six o'clock dinner with zest.

I can't say how it began, but from the day Miss Lincoln joined our circle at dinner, a constraint seemed to fall upon both the masculine and feminine element therein. "Why on earth does she set herself up as a such a paragon of perfection?" said pretty little Marie St. Loo. "Anybody to hear her talk would think it positively sinful to use powder; and as for a faint *soupeçon* of rouge! one might as well be 'Anathema Maranatha' at once."

"Yes, but why?" remarked poor Emma Bellamy, who had a complexion like parchment, and a skin that seemed to have gone all wrong in the creases. "Why is she always going on about girls who paint or powder? Just simply to draw attention to her own matchless complexion. I wish she had a skin like mine, and then see what she would do."

"What would she do? Why paint, like all or most of us do, and not be ashamed of it either," said candid Jennie Groves "What do you say, Mr. Morley; do you think it very horrible in women to paint?"

"Well, I think it is a moot point," said I. "If a woman is so very pallid that her face almost gives one a shock, and she thinks a touch of colour would make her more pleasant to behold, I, for one, have not a word to say against it, provided it does not injure her health, and there is no deceit and no endeavour to make capital out of the practice."

"There is not much deceit in the way the art is practised in this country," said Marie St. Loo with a laugh, "therefore it is all the more unnecessary for Miss Lincoln to be so aggressively rude about it. She said the other day that no Christian gentlewoman would ever use artificial means to enhance her beauty. What do you think of that?"

"I suppose she considers herself an epitome of all the Christian virtues," said Emma Bellamy indignantly, "and looks upon us as 'publicans and sinners.'"

We all laughed at poor Emma's indignation, but you may imagine from this conversation the feeling there was towards Miss Lincoln.

For my own part I could not—as her compatriots say—"reckon her up." She seemed, as the other girls said, to take her stand on a kind of pedestal, from which she viewed the world of men and women beneath her with a species of cold, calm contempt.

Why she was studying under Lamperti no one seemed to know. She had no voice, and he frequently told her so; perhaps she meant to teach when she returned to Boston, and having been a pupil of Lamperti would give her a certain amount of prestige; but, as she appeared to have plenty of money, it hardly seemed necessary for her to become a teacher. But had she plenty of money, and was the old body, whom she so ostentatiously called nurse before people, really her nurse, or was there a stronger tie between them?

You will wonder at my saying this, but one morning, as I was descending the stone staircase of the Casa, very early, the following, to me, incomprehensible words came from the half-opened doorway of Miss Lincoln's *étage*. "But, mother, you must get me some; how can I go down to Baveno without? You know how hot the sun will be on the boat; the shop will be open by now, and I cannot——" But there the door closed sharply, and I lost the rest of the sentence. What does she want her mother to get for her that she cannot get herself, I wondered; and was that "old anatomy," as one of the young fellows irreverently termed her, Miss Lincoln's mother?

If so, what a sham and a hypocrite the girl was. And then a sudden idea flashed through my brain. If she palmed off her mother as her nurse, would she not be equally capable of palming off a made-up complexion as her own, and, to divert suspicion from herself, censure those who indulged in the practice.

Then I took myself to task something after this fashion. "You don't like the girl, and therefore you are ready at the first suspicion to imagine all kinds of evil things about her. Why should you think that it was something for her face which she wished her mother to get for her?" I tried to drive the thought away, and succeeded for a time, but circumstances arose which forced me to put my thought to the test.

The next day was Saturday, and several of the students went on board with me as I started by the three o'clock boat for Baveno. It was a lovely afternoon, and we were all prepared to enjoy a delightful trip down the grand old Lago Maggiore.

Almost the first I saw on deck, quietly fanning themselves, were Miss Lincoln and her nurse-chaperon.

"Oh!" I thought, "I wonder if she has got the specific she so urgently required yesterday morning." But there was no trace of anxiety on that statuesque face; indeed she seemed rather more complacent than usual.

"Is it not lovely?" she exclaimed. "One wonders there is not a general exodus from Milan every Saturday afternoon; the intense quietness, after the noise of the streets, is so refreshing. One tries to imagine what the world would be like if we could rest content with such idyllic pleasures as these."

"The world would be a very different kind of place to live in, no doubt," I replied, "and we should escape a great deal of worry and trouble if we were more content with 'the goods the gods provide us;' but then there would be no emulation, no 'struggle for existence,' no 'survival of the fittest,' if this kind of thing prevailed."

"Very likely I am wrong," said Miss Lincoln. "Are you ambitious, Mr. Morley?" she added.

"Ambitious! of what?" I asked.

"Oh! of making a name and fortune; of being able to go where you like, and to do what you like; of having plenty of money, in fact."

"Yes, I think I am ambitious to a certain extent. I certainly should not care to live a life where the *dolce far niente* played a great part, but I do not think having plenty of money always conduces to happiness."

"It goes a very long way, though," said Miss Lincoln, with a short little laugh.

"Perhaps," I answered; "but I think there is nothing like having plenty of congenial work to do to make one happy."

A faint sneer curved her lips as she said, "That is not *my* idea of happiness."

I thought she seemed in rather a desponding, pessimistic mood, so, to turn the conversation, I said, 'Do you stay at the Hôtel de l'Europe?'

"Oh, no," she replied, "that is rather too expensive for me. I am going to stay at the Hôtel de la Paix, where my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Bentley, always put up."

We had a pleasant voyage, and on reaching Bayeno were

quite prepared to enjoy our dinner, before proceeding to the church for the weekly practice.

Among the congregation at the morning service I noticed a handsome, happy-looking young fellow, whom I put down at once as English. He was very devout, and listened to the sermon with more attention than did the majority of the congregation—to the stale old platitudes of the Rev. Fawcett Wegge.

With the young fellow was a man whose face had a strangely familiar look to me. Where had I met him before? It kept bothering me all the service.

The doubt was soon solved; as I was returning to the hotel to luncheon the two strangers passed, and the elder turned and looked me in the face.

"By Jove!" said he, "it's Morley. Why, what brings you here, old man? How awfully glad I am to see you."

"Why, Disney, is it you?" I replied. "I thought I had seen that old figure-head of yours somewhere before, when you appeared in church to-day; but may I ask what brings you here—have you left Rugby?"

"Yes, two years ago. I am now with Viscount Dereham as travelling tutor. Let me introduce you to each other."

We strolled on together, talking of old days and other scenes, when just at the corner of the village street I heard Lord Dereham exclaim, "What a lovely face! Did you ever see such a complexion?"

I turned to see who had caused this sudden burst of admiration, knowing intuitively, in my own mind, to whom he was alluding.

"Who is she?" he added.

"That is Miss Lincoln, a young American who is studying singing under Lamperti. We call her 'la belle Américaine,' on account of that wonderful complexion which you noticed," I replied.

Just then we met, and as I raised my hat the two men did the same. Miss Lincoln gave a quick glance at Lord Dereham—whose open admiration was ludicrously apparent—then dropped her lovely violet eyes, and with a calm bow walked on in her usual stately manner.

"Is she not beautiful?" exclaimed the young Viscount. "Why she might pose for one of the beauties of the old world. Helen of Troy or Cleopatra couldn't hold a candle to her!"

"I don't know about holding a candle to Miss Lincoln," said I, "it is a pity they didn't hold one to themselves, and make a

funeral pyre thereof, instead of setting the world on fire, as those celebrated beauties are said to have done—but Miss Lincoln is certainly very pretty."

"Pretty!" in a tone of disgust, "why, she is simply exquisite."

"There, now he is off," said Disney; "he falls in love, on an average, once in six weeks, and you may guess the time I have with him. Let us go and have luncheon, something to eat and drink is a famous panacea for incipient love."

"What an awful fib!" said the young fellow, turning crimson. "Do you know," to me, "Disney is so awfully afraid of not delivering me safe and intact to my lady mother that every girl he meets he is suspicious of, and thinks she has designs on myself and title."

"Quite right, too," said I; "you are a trifle impressionable, I should imagine."

After luncheon we took our cigars, and strolled down to the lake, to see who were going over to the islands for the usual row before afternoon service.

My favourite island was "Isola Bella," but I had been over its old palace and through the lovely gardens so often that I did not care to go again, though much pressed to do so by Marie St. Loo and Emma Bellamy, who were making up a party to go across.

Just as they pushed off Miss Lincoln and her chaperon came in sight, and when they saw the boat, hurried up, as if to catch it; but it was too late, and besides that the boat had its full complement of passengers.

"What a pity! I am so disappointed," she exclaimed, "for very likely this is my last chance of seeing the islands."

"May I be allowed?" said rather an excited voice; and then, "please introduce me," came in a determined tone from Lord Dereham, as if he expected some opposition to his request, and was bent on frustrating it.

Of course I complied; and he at once begged to be allowed to take them himself.

Disney, I could see, was dreadfully annoyed when Miss Lincoln graciously accepted the young Viscount's offer, and proposed to go with them; but I gave him a look as much as to say, "Let him have his own way now; much harm can't be done in the short time they are together," so he quietly sat down on one of the old boats, and watched them off in silence.

For a time we puffed silently at our cigarettes, till a chance word set us off, and we just revelled in reminiscences of the past; at last the silver-toned bell rang out its note of warning for the afternoon service, and I rose to go. "Shall you come with me?" I asked.

"No, I think not, I will wait a little longer for them; it is too bad of Dereham, he knows how anxious I get if he is away for long."

"But why on earth should you be anxious?" said I; "surely he is old enough to take care of himself."

"My dear fellow," said Disney, "as I said before, you have no idea how impressionable he is. I should not be at all surprised if he does not rave about that lovely woman for weeks, and perpetrate all kinds of mad actions in consequence."

"What a nuisance! He must be a dreadful responsibility for you. Adieu for the present then. I must not stay longer; but I am sorry to leave you like Patience on a boat instead of a monument; however, they can't be long now."

They were longer, though, than we had expected, and on my return I was just in time to see Lord Dereham, with much *empressement*, helping Miss Lincoln from the brilliant-hued gondola, while Disney performed the same office—without the *empressement*—for the old nurse.

"Oh! we have had such a lovely time," said the fair American. "Look at this bouquet of flowers, isn't it real elegant? One of the gardeners gave it to me. I was the only one he would cut his camellias and roses for—don't you think I must have fascinated him?" with a slightly disdainful though curious look at Disney's gloomy face.

"Humph!" was all that individual deigned to say.

Miss Lincoln turned to the young Viscount, who seemed unable to withdraw his gaze from her lovely face, and said, with a deliciously simple yet at the same time inquiring look, from out the corners of her flower-like eyes: "I hope it hasn't tired you rowing us across, I did so enjoy it; and I shall treasure these flowers always"—smelling delicately the heliotrope—"as a pleasant remembrance of a well-spent Sunday afternoon—what do you say, milord?"

"Well spent! yes, indeed," replied the young fellow. "I don't know when I have enjoyed an afternoon more; and," turning to Disney, "it hasn't been time thrown away, as your looks would seem to imply. Why, I have learnt a whole heap of history

by what I have been shown—the tree on which Napoleon cut his name before the battle of Marengo, the gloves he wore on the same momentous occasion ; and lots more. Oh ! you really ought to have come with us, Disney ; it is just the kind of place that would have interested you," and he laughed delightedly.

The tutor's face was a study ; and I wondered whether the young Viscount spoke in complete forgetfulness of how clearly he had shown he did not wish for Disney's company ; or whether he said it in a kind of mischievous *diablerie*, just for the fun of the thing.

Disney made no answer to the remark, except to say, "It is time we went back to the hotel," and walked on.

"Are you going by the same steamer to Milan?" said Miss Lincoln, addressing Lord Dereham in a soft, low voice.

"No, I wish to goodness we were ; but my tutor has made arrangements to stay here for a few days longer ; however, you may be sure," with a rising blush, which lit up his handsome young face, "I shall be in Milan as soon as ever I can persuade Mr. Disney to come."

In less than an hour we were bidding them adieu on the quay of the small landing-place which Baveno then possessed.

"I will not say 'Good bye,' then, but only 'Au revoir,' as I hope to see you soon again," said Lord Dereham, holding Miss Lincoln's daintily gloved hand, much longer than was absolutely necessary.

"We shall be delighted to see you again—at least, I can answer for myself," said the fair American, with a bewitching down-dropping of her long fringed eyelids, which, as their shadow lay on her cheeks, threw out into bold relief the lovely colouring beneath, and made her complexion, in the soft evening glow, positively dazzling.

"My!" said outspoken Emma Bellamy, as we took our seats on deck, "isn't she making the running? Poor boy! I believe he is quite bowled over already. If that tutor of his has a grain of sense in his head he will take the next train back to Paris, instead of following her to Milan."

"He certainly seemed very 'gone' upon Miss Lincoln for so short an acquaintance," I replied ; "but it is too absurd to suppose she would dream of captivating a young fellow so much her junior ; she ought to be had up for child stealing if she succeeded," I added with a laugh.

"Wait and see," said Emma. "Don't think me unkind, but I

believe that woman is dying to make a good match. She did nothing but talk about him all the time we were packing; she says he comes of age in two months, and then his rent roll will be £40,000 a year, independently of his father, and when he succeeds to the earldom it will be something enormous."

"But who told her this?" I asked. "Surely she would not question Lord Dereham on such a subject."

"Oh! that I can't say; Miss Lincoln is equal to most things in that calm *insouciant* way of hers. I don't suppose she would need to ask him; don't you know they say every American girl who hopes to get into society has Debrett at her fingers' ends?"

"Rather an unprofitable study, I should think. But you do not seem to like the Americans, Miss Bellamy."

"Yes, I do. I like Marie St. Loo, for instance—where would you find a kinder-hearted girl or a truer friend? But I can't say I have 'cottoned' to this Miss Lincoln."

"Well, let us hope that you will get to like her better the more you know her"—Emma shook her head—"and that you are mistaken in the present instance. It would be too dreadful. Fancy poor Disney's face if his pupil really fell in love with Miss Lincoln, and proposed! What a *contretemps*! Why, it would be enough to give him a fit." And at the recollection of his sober, solemn face that afternoon when Lord Dereham so quietly rowed off with the fair American, I roared with laughter.

A few days later, as I was returning from a singing lesson with dear old Lamperti, I turned into the cathedral to enjoy for a few minutes its coolness and shade. The heat outside was intense and oppressive, and as I passed up the stately nave I felt thankful I had entered. Before I had taken many steps they were arrested by the sound of a low, faint laugh which sounded familiar, and, turning to the right, there stood Miss Lincoln and Lord Dereham, criticising a marvellously coloured stained-glass window, representing St. Michael overthrowing his Satanic Majesty.

I fancied the couple looked annoyed at seeing me, but the sudden thought of how vexed poor old Disney would be, if he could know how his pupil was amusing himself made me determine to forsake the rôle of amiability by *not* effacing myself, and I determined to stay and spoil sport.

"Did I hear a faint laugh as I entered?" said I.

"Yes, I laughed at something Marie St. Loo said," replied

Miss Lincoln. "What a fund of humour that girl has! she is always saying something ridiculous; just now, before she went away, she said that wonderful statue of St. Bartholomew without his skin, and showing all his anatomy, tickled her immensely, and that she was sure Dean Swift must have seen it on a hot day like the present, or he would never have said he would 'like to get out of his skin, and sit in his bones.' Then she said she admired Il Diavolo much more than St. Michael, and if he is as beautiful as that painting depicts, she is sure she shall fall in love with him if they meet in the 'Shades.'"

"What a caution she is!" I remarked laughing; "but one can't help being amused at her."

"But don't you think it very wrong to talk in that flippant way? My people would be shocked if they knew I associated with any one who spoke lightly of sacred things; but then they are of the strictly Evangelical school; they do say my ancestors came over with the Puritan fathers," elevating her dainty little nose in the air.

"And a jolly bad lot some of them were," I could not help muttering *sotto voce*. Then a sudden thought flashed through my mind. "I see her little game; she is trying the goody-goody dodge on him. I only hope she won't succeed."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Miss Lincoln," said the Viscount, "for my mother is extremely Low Church."

"But why should you be glad?" said I. "Your mother, the Countess of Beresford, and Miss Lincoln are not likely to meet, and cannot, therefore, come into conflict over their theological opinions. You said you were returning to the States very soon, did you not?" I said, turning to his companion.

"I did, but circumstances have arisen which may prevent my going back, have they not?" letting her eyes rest on Lord Dereham with a seeming shyness in their glorious depths.

"By Jove! but this looks serious," I thought, and looked at Lord Dereham for an explanation.

"Yes, indeed! the happiest, most unexpected thing has happened for me, but can you not guess?"

"No! I never was good at guessing. The simplest riddle in the world, such as 'who killed Cain?' is always sufficient to stump me; and in this case"—with most distinct emphasis—"I have no grounds to go upon."

"Mr. Morley is not in the mood for guessing," said Miss

Lincoln, with a sweet smile, while at the same time she shot an evil glance at me from the corner of her eye the farthest from Lord Dereham; "we will wait a more convenient opportunity."

"Not a bit of it, I want to tell him now that you have promised to be my wife, and so make me one of the happiest of men. Congratulate me."

"What! Already!" I exclaimed in astonishment; then added—with rather a poor attempt at felicitation, I am afraid—"why, certainly I congratulate *you*," looking straight at Miss Lincoln, as I used the pronoun.

"Thank you," she said with a cold smile, "though I don't think I can compliment you on the manner of your congratulations; but I trust they are sincere."

"Why, of course they are," interrupted Lord Dereham; "don't you think I ought to be congratulated?" with a certain emphasis on the "ought."

"Does Disney know?" I said, ignoring his question.

"No, but I shall tell him immediately on my return."

"Don't hurry yourself; I shall be passing your hotel on my way back, and will drop in and see him."

"Do, there's a good fellow, and say a good word for us. I quite expect he will cut up rough at first, because he has always been so anxious that I should not get engaged till he had resigned his charge of me."

"Well, without saying a disparaging word of Miss Lincoln" (with a little bow to her), "you must allow it is rather rough, as you call it, on Disney; remember, he has to account to your parents for his stewardship."

"Oh, yes, we all know that," in a grumpy voice; "but surely a fellow has a right to please himself in the most momentous choice of his life. But," turning with a rapturous look in his blue eyes to his fair *fiancée*, "when they see her, why"—with a slight wave of his hand—"there will be nothing more to be said."

"Will there not?" thought I. "There will be a great deal more to be said before your parents consent to your marriage with an American singer, or I am very much mistaken."

"*Au revoir* for the present, then," and I walked away.

I found Disney, with a cigarette between his lips and a cup of *café noir* by his side, trying to while away the hot afternoon and the neuralgic pains which tortured him.

"Well, old man, how are you?" said I. "How delightful this room is! almost as cool as the cathedral."

"Better, thanks; but why do you mention the cathedral? Is it cool there?"

"Rather, almost as cool as some of the people who were viewing it?"

"Why, who were they? Anybody I know?"

"Yes, one or two—among them your pupil."

"With Miss Lincoln?"

"Yes"—decidedly—"very much with her."

"I knew it," said Disney, starting to his feet, "if it had not been for this damnable neuralgia we should have gone together. Well, what has happened?" turning to me almost fiercely.

"He has proposed to Miss Lincoln and been accepted."

"Good God! You don't mean it! The young fool! Why he knows absolutely nothing of her! He must be mad!"

"He is not the first man who has been mad enough to be caught by a lovely face, before waiting to find out if the inward character matched with the outward presentment," said I. "I have no doubt he thinks her faultless."

"What *will* his strait-laced old mother say when she knows?" said Disney, with a groan. "They will never receive her; you have no idea how fearfully narrow-minded and prejudiced they are. What shall I do, Morley? There will be no end of a row."

"You can do nothing but keep your eyes open, and not give him too much liberty. Is he dependent on his father?"

"No, that is the worst of it; if he were there might be some inducement for him to wait, but he has a very large income of his own, left him by an old aunt."

"Phew! that complicates matters, as, of course, if he is independent he can please himself. Well, *che sara sara*; take my advice, old man, don't worry, but keep your eyes open."

"What about to-night, are you going to La Scala?" said Disney.

"Yes, I have promised to escort Miss Bellamy and Marie St. Loo. And you?"

"I go with Dereham, but shouldn't be at all surprised if he wishes now to take some one else as well."

"Never mind, go with him just the same and you will have the delightful experience of playing 'gooseberry.'"

* * * * *

As we seated ourselves in the opera house, I heard a startled gasp on my right, and, turning, saw Miss Bellamy—with her mouth decidedly too open for beauty—staring at a box on the first tier.

"For goodness' sake give me an opera glass. That can't be Miss Lincoln sitting there—it is though," as she adjusted the glasses. "How on earth did she get a seat in that box? How lovely she looks in that dead white silk, without any ornaments or flowers! I don't believe any other woman's complexion in the house could stand it; that old chaperon, with the parchment-like face, makes a capital foil."

"Who is that presenting her with a bouquet?" said Marie St. Loo; "it looks like Lord Dereham."

"So it is; now, who was right?" with a triumphant ring in her voice; "didn't I say she would have his scalp?"

"It looks like it," said I, "but it may end in nothing after all."

"Only look at her face, that is enough to prove what I say; she *has* captured him, and is radiant in consequence."

I could not help owning that it seemed very probable she was right, and took a look through the glass to see how Disney was bearing himself.

His look of intense gloom was so pronounced that I could not help feeling heartily sorry for him; and thankful that I was not in his position of responsibility. On our way home, after the performance, several of the students joined us, and the one topic of conversation was the sensation "*la belle Américaine*" had created, and the lover-like attentions bestowed on her by the young Viscount.

"What a pretty woman Madlle. Muser is!" said Marie St. Loo the next morning at luncheon.

"Do you think so?" said Miss Lincoln; "I think she is greatly overrated, both as an artiste and a beauty. Who could be lovely with such great staring eyes?"

"But don't you know the reason why her eyes look so staring?" said Emma Bellamy, "it was because she had such an amount of bistre under them, and the rouge was dabbed on anyhow. I can't understand a *prima donna* being so careless, especially in such a place as Milan."

"I think it is a pity to paint at all for the stage," said Lord Dereham; "if no artistes did it, then it wouldn't be expected, and no face can stand it long, they say."

"Not if it is put on in the 'rough and ready' way affected by Madlle. Muser," said Miss Lincoln; "it is an art like anything else."

"Why, how do you know?" said Miss Bellamy, flashing a keen glance out of her sharp grey eyes; "you have never been on the stage yet, so don't need to paint."

"Certainly not; but I have heard my friends in America, when they were personating characters at fancy dress balls, discussing the practice. For my own part I should never dream of employing artificial means of any kind," and she looked haughtily at Miss Bellamy.

"I am sure you would not," exclaimed Lord Dereham; "anything that savours of deceit must be as abhorrent to you as it is to me."

"Oh! that's all very well," said the irrepressible Emma, "but I see no harm in painting when it is done openly, like it is in this country; it is when people deny the 'soft impeachment' that I think it's so horridly mean."

"I quite agree with you," said Lord Dereham; "I would never trust a person again if I found them acting so deceitfully."

We were all amused at the warmth with which he expressed himself, as the subject seemed too trivial, to most of us, to get excited about; but happening to glance at Miss Lincoln, I was startled to see the change in her face.

"Humph?" thought I, "is she going to faint? She has gone white even to her lips," and then it struck me as odd that she still retained a faint rose flush of colour on her cheeks.

"Don't you feel well?" I asked; "I hope you are not going to faint."

"Faint, not she," said a young medico sitting near; "people don't faint with a colour in their faces, so don't be afraid."

"I am not afraid of fainting," said Miss Lincoln, rising, "perhaps the heat has affected me; I will go and lie down."

"Do," said the young Viscount, offering her his arm, "I shall be so disappointed if you can't go with us to 'La Brera' this afternoon," and he led her away lovingly.

Some of us, I am sorry to say, were amused at this episode, Miss Bellamy gave a snort of disgust, and muttered "humbug" under her breath, and Disney ground his teeth at this fresh proof of his pupil's infatuation.

"What can one do, Morley? Can't you advise a fellow?" he said,

"Come round to my rooms, and have a talk," I replied.

"As we settled ourselves for a smoke, I said, 'Well, it won't be for much longer now; you start for Paris on Saturday, there, with 'fresh fields and pastures new,' who can tell what may happen—he may forget all about her.'"

"No such luck, he has refused to leave till after next Tuesday, as it happens to be Miss Lincoln's birthday; and there is some talk about him waiting in Paris to escort her, and her chaperon to London."

"That looks serious."

"Serious! I should think it does, I can't sleep for thinking of the entanglement the foolish boy has got into. By the way, did you notice how queer she went when we were talking about women painting? I wished she painted."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I believe he would break it off with her if she did, he has such a horror of it."

"What will you bet me she doesn't paint? What will you give me if I prove it?"

"How could you prove it? You could not accuse her openly to her face," said Disney.

"No, for she would simply deny it. I have, however, an idea in my head which, with your aid, I mean to attempt to put into practice; if it does not succeed we can only say, 'the attempt and not the deed confounds us.'"

As I unfolded my plan Disney's face cleared somewhat, and at parting he looked a little more cheerful than he had done for some time past.

The next few days flew by with lightning speed; for when I contemplated what I intended doing, a disagreeable thrill ran through all my nerves, and I felt almost inclined to back out of my promise, and tell Disney it was too risky.

However, the eventful birthday dawned, and I determined to carry out my plan, daring and wild as it seemed.

I must confess it was with no small amount of trepidation I ascended the stone staircase to Miss Lincoln's *étage*, carrying a basket of flowers for her acceptance, among which was hidden a dainty pink coral and pearl bangle, which the students had subscribed for, as a little acknowledgment of the reception she was giving them.

In a few minutes Miss Lincoln entered, and as we shook hands she said rather hurriedly, "I am sorry to have kept you waiting,

but my companion is not very well; surely that clock must be slow, or you are rather early."

"Yes," I replied, "I came rather early to bring you these before the other guests arrived," and I handed her the flowers."

"What lovely roses!" she exclaimed, "where did you get them?"

"There is something more inside," I said, as I took a low chair by the side of the lounge on which she was seated; and as I looked at her I could not help thinking how beautiful she was, and hated myself for the part I was going to play, and almost wished I should be unsuccessful—but time was getting on, and it *had* to be done.

"I hope you are feeling better," said I; "what made you look so ill the other day?"

"The heat, I think," she replied, "or else the inane chatter of that Miss Bellamy; she never seems to be able to get beyond personalities."

"Oh! come, are you not a little hard on poor Emma?"

She was only standing up for the right of every one to please themselves, even to the matter of painting their faces.

"Yes, but I think such subjects are better left alone; no good woman, who has the slightest respect for herself, would ever condescend to try and attract admiration by painting her face;" so saying she lifted the bunch of roses, and held them daintily to her nose.

"No one would imagine you did," said I; "why the roses just match the lovely colour on your face," and at the same moment drew my handkerchief—which I had previously carefully saturated with eau de cologne—quickly down the cheek that was nearest to me.

It was done! and not until she sprang to her feet, nearly knocking me over in her excitement, did I realize the importance of the action I had taken, for there, on the fair white cambric, lay a long streak of the loveliest carmine, and as I held it, the streak widened, running into the soaked handkerchief, and bearing silent witness to the lie of which the angry woman before me had been guilty.

"How dare you!" she gasped, "how dare you! what right have you to insult me like this?"

For the moment I was too dazed at the success of my plan to speak; but before I could say anything she caught sight of her face in the looking-glass, and seeing the appalling contrast her cheeks presented—for the strong perfume had removed every trace of colour from the one—she turned on me like a tigress,

and picking up a small Italian dagger that lay on the table near, aimed a blow at me which, if I had not caught her hand, would very likely have inflicted a dangerous, if not deadly wound.

"For shame! Miss Lincoln," I exclaimed, "would you try and stab a man who has done you no wrong?"

"Wrong!" she hissed, "you have ruined me. Oh! I could kill you with pleasure. What reason had you to suspect me? What right to interfere with me in any way?"

"The right of every honest person to expose deceit," I said undauntedly.

"Expose!" she ejaculated; "you don't mean to say"—but just then, to my intense relief, I heard footsteps on the stairs, and before Miss Lincoln could reach the door, towards which she rushed in a frantic effort to escape being seen, Disney and Lord Dereham entered, the latter remarking in a happy tone, "Well, we are in good time;" then, as his *fiancée* abruptly turned her back to him, he exclaimed, "Why, what is the matter? you are not ill again, I hope," and going towards her, he gently took her hand and tried to turn her round.

"Let me go," she said in a sharp voice, "I do not feel well," He released her instantly, and she was moving to the door, when it struck me that if she went before he saw her face my efforts to undeceive him and help Disney would be futile, so, holding out the handkerchief, I said rapidly, "The result of a bet, of which Miss Lincoln evidently does not approve."

Seeing her last chance of escaping detection gone, she turned and faced us, exclaiming beneath her teeth, "Brute!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Lord Dereham, "what is it?" then, catching sight of Miss Lincoln's face, he rushed forward, and seizing her by the shoulders held her fast, and gazed into her face with a look of incredulity it was piteous to see.

"Good God!" he ejaculated, "what has come to your face?"

"Ask rather what has come off it," I replied, drawing his attention to the pink stain on the handkerchief. I felt thoroughly disinclined for the task, but it was no good drawing back now.

"The fact is," I continued, "you have been deceived; Miss Lincoln *does* paint, although she has denied it, and it is only right and fair that you should know."

As the truth dawned on him that the woman he loved so much had cheated him from the first, his hand dropped from her

shoulders, and he flung himself, with a low groan into a chair, hiding his face in his hands, as if he could not bear to look on her despoiled loveliness.

"Oh! it is too awful! too horrible!" I heard him mutter under his breath.

Miss Lincoln stood glaring savagely at me, evidently undecided what to do, and I racked my brains how to end the situation—which was growing terribly strained—quickly.

At last I said, "Your friends will soon be here, Miss Lincoln; had you not better prepare for them? Your face, in its present condition, might strike them as bordering on the grotesque."

"Don't, don't say any more, for God's sake! I cannot bear it," said Lord Dereham, and he got up with a long, shuddering sigh.

"I am only cruel to be kind," I answered; "come, I think we had better leave Miss Lincoln to receive her guests alone."

The words seemed to arouse "*la belle Américaine*," who walked hurriedly to the door; as she opened it she turned and said, with a viciousness which fairly petrified us, "I hope to heaven I may never see one of you again!" To me she added, "Beast! how I hate you!" The door banged and she was gone.

We walked back to the hotel in complete silence, but as I shook hands, Lord Dereham said sadly, "Do not think me ungrateful, but it has been a rough and painful awakening," and as he raised his eyes to mine I saw they were full of tears, then he added, with a sob in his voice, "You don't know how intensely I loved her; indeed I thought she was all that was good and true."

"Of course you did," I replied, "and I was afraid you might think my interference unwarrantable, but I am convinced you have had a happy escape from a false and designing woman."

"Perhaps so," he said with a sigh, and then, turning quickly, he rushed up the hotel stairs, as if he could bear no more.

"Well!" said Disney, drawing a long breath, "I can hardly believe your plan has been so successful; you cannot imagine the relief it is to me, and I am sure you have earned the everlasting gratitude of Dereham's father and mother; but it was an awfully risky thing to do, and I don't know how you ever had the courage to attempt it."

"*L'audace, l'audace, toujours l'audace*," I exclaimed, "and in this case, I think everybody will allow, the end justified the audacity, as well as the means."

RATCLIFF HOARE.

The Blackbird in the Copse.

ACROSS the water-meadows the summer heat lay in a shimmering golden haze; the grass was white with moon-daisies, and their satin petals flashed back a white glare into the blinding face of the sun. The river lay a streak of burnished silver between its white banks; the eye could find no rest on it save where it loitered, translucent green and russet brown, beneath the gray-blue shade of some drooping willow. The cows were grouped together in the scanty shadow afforded by the high rose-enriched hedges, gazing out dreamily over the sunlit pastures, or sleepily chewing the cud.

Down at Farmer Burford's the ducks, their toilets made, dozed by the pond; the fowls huddled with drooping heads on the fence, or crouched with half-spread wings in the dust. In the farmyard the great sows lay peacefully dreaming in the sun-baked mire, their litters clustering around them. Silence lay upon everything, broken only by an occasional rustle and half-suppressed whinny from the stables, a smothered snore from the sleeping pigs, or a crooning cluck from the fowls as they shifted their position on the fence. Above all arched the sky, deep blue, cloudless and serene, as only a June day knows it.

Further up the lane, at the little flower-embowered cottage where Miss Rose Garton lived, the same profound stillness reigned. Out at the back of the house, Jane, the servant, sat nodding on the doorstep, and the tall hollyhocks and sunflowers were all a-nodding too. In the tiny sitting-room in the front of the house Miss Rose sat knitting by the open French window, her needles moving silently to and fro amongst the fleecy white wool. Monthly roses and jasmine wreathed about the window, and tall white lilies and other sweet flowers and a great bush of rosemary grew in the flower beds below. Sometimes a rose petal would fall from an overblown flower and come drifting to her feet.

Fifty-five Junes had passed over Miss Rose Garton's head and left it as white as the snowy wool she was knitting, or the white lilies that lifted their stately crowns beside her. The years had robbed her eyes of the brightness and colour that had once made

them like a summer sky. Once her cheeks were round and pink as her own clustering roses ; now Time had laid his fingers on them and left hollows where dimples had been, and had filched the colour from them till they looked like the rose petals she collected and laid in the sun to dry, before placing them in a jar to fill her room with fragrance. Once she had been the fairest flower in the country-side, and many a man had desired to carry her away and plant her in his own heart's garden, there to tend her all his life ; but now the form that had been straight and lissom as her Madonna lilies was frail and drooping, and Time had painted the pale violet hues of sorrow and weeping beneath her eyes.

It was over twenty years since, on her father's death, she left the old rectory where she had been born and came to live alone in her little rose-covered cottage. Many had been her suitors before and after her father's death, and indeed it was well known that Squire Vernon always wanted her to marry him, and had remained single for her till the day of his death, last winter. He courted her as a young girl in her father's house, and after her father's death he had come to her again and again, so people said, and begged her to change her mind. But it was rumoured that she had lost her heart to young Harry Vernon, the Squire's brother, who left home so suddenly when she was only eighteen, and they said she had been waiting for him ever since, though it was well known from the Squire himself that Harry had disgraced his family by marrying a barmaid or something very low indeed.

Yet still she sat by her window, waiting—waiting—though Harry Vernon never came back, and the Squire died unmarried, and Time stole her beauties from her one by one, but could not steal from her the loveliness which, like the fragrance of the roses, stayed with her long after all actual charms had fled.

So she sat knitting by the open window, looking out with faded, peaceful eyes over the dazzling water-meadows, where the cattle stood motionless in the shade of the rose-hedge that lengthened imperceptibly over the grass. And the lilies gave up their richest scents to her, and the rose petals fell and drifted to her feet. Presently a great bee came buzzing about the lilies and roses ; he hummed harmlessly by Miss Rose's head, and sailed round her little room on a tour of inspection, and then came back to the lilies and crept up into a white bell with many busy

murmurs. Miss Rose's needles moved slower; a new look came into her gentle eyes—a look of longing—as she sat gazing out into the golden sunlight. On such an afternoon—how many years ago?—a bee had buzzed thus among the lilies and roses in the old rectory garden. The knitting needles lay at rest in her delicate hands among the fleecy wool on her knees. The bee tumbled backwards out of the lily bell with a loud z-z-zz, and droned away, covered with golden pollen, to his hive in Farmer Burford's orchard. Silence settled down again over all, but Miss Rose's hands still lay idle in her lap. A white butterfly came fluttering across her vision; there were butterflies, too—white butterflies—in the rectory garden that summer afternoon when she was young.

Suddenly from an adjacent copse, clear, sweet and rich, came the full contralto notes of a blackbird breaking upon the golden silence. They throbbed through the heated air like a passionate love song, each note speaking of boundless joy, a golden melody of delight. Slowly the tears welled up in Miss Rose's faded eyes and rolled down her cheeks. She saw a youth and maiden standing among the lilies and roses in the old rectory garden, where the bees droned, and the butterflies flitted from flower to flower, and his arms were about her, and his lips pressed to her lips, while they stood bathed in the summer sunlight with the blackbird's song telling of love, love, love, all around them There came the crunch of wheels and stumbling hoofs along the lane. Farmer Burford's wife was driving her married sister, who was on a visit, into the little market town.

"My word, how hot it is!" panted the married sister, who was fat, fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief and sniffing her smelling salts. "And how that bird *do* sing!"

"Yes," said the farmer's wife, flicking the flies off the jogging pony; "I can't mind hearing the blackbirds so beautiful since I was a little tiny child."

"Well, now, that's as pretty a little place as you might wish to see!" exclaimed the married sister, flouncing round with a jingle of jet bugles—she was wearing her best mantle of thick black cloth in honour of the drive—and staring up at Miss Rose's cottage. "And who's the old lady sitting by the window? She do look just like a picture, to be sure."

"That's Miss Rose Garton," said the farmer's wife, also turning

her head to look up to the cottage; "the old parson's daughter she was; she's lived there ever since he died, an' that was before I was married. Squire Vernon that I was telling you about last night, always wanted her; that's why he never married. But they *do* say she lost her heart to young Mr. Harry, the Squire's brother, as left home so sudden; they say he was a bad lot, but I thought him a fine gentleman, and so handsome and affable. And Miss Rose, too, I mind her when she was a young girl, about my Katey's age, as you might say, an' as lovely as a flower; an' my! the way the young gentlemen used to come from all the country round to church of a Sunday to see Miss Rose sitting in the parson's pew. Bless that bird, how he's singing! You'd think he'd tire himself out."

The pony had climbed to level ground, and the farmer's wife giving him an adroit touch of the whip in the tenderest part of his person, he started off at a jog-trot along the dusty road towards the little market town.

The sound of the wheels died away in the distance, but the blackbird sang on, and Miss Rose still sat gazing through her tear-dimmed eyes at the sun-lighted, landscape, dreaming of years long dead. The bird's song ceased, yet still Miss Rose sat musing, while the shadows lengthened across the water-meadows. At last she rose from her place, her knitting falling unheeded to the floor, and crossing the little room with tremulous footsteps, unlocked an inlaid escritoire and drew therefrom a withered flower and a worn morocco miniature case.

She held them in her hands and looked at them till a rush of hot tears blinded her eyes, then she raised them to her lips and kissed them again and again, passionately, hungrily.

"Harry," she murmured, "Harry, my love, my love, will you never come back to me? I have waited so long, so long." And she bowed her head against the escritoire and wept there with her treasure clasped closely to her breast.

* * * * *

Farmer Burford's spring cart had come to a halt on the dusty road, and the farmer's wife was holding a lengthy conversation with a tall, gaunt old man with a thin, dark face and snow-white hair.

"It is so long since I was here," said the white-haired man, in rich, refined tones that were somehow familiar to the farmer's

wife, "that I thought I might venture to ask you a few questions of people I once knew."

"Yes, sir, with pleasure," said the farmer's wife, and waited, puzzled by a haunting likeness that she could not trace.

"Old Mr. Garton," went on the stranger in a hesitating tone, "I suppose he has been dead a long time; but of course he must be; I forgot how time had flown; why it is nearly forty years since I last saw him, and he was an elderly man then."

"Oh yes, sir," said the farmer's wife, "he's been dead these twenty years and more. Why, we've had two parsons since him."

"Yes, yes," sighed the old man, "I have been abroad so long, without news of the old home—and—and—Squire Vernon and his wife; I hope they are well?"

"Squire Vernon and his wife," repeated the farmer's wife, "why they died ever so long ago, long before Mr. Harry Vernon left home even, and Squire George, their son, who died last winter, he never married at all."

"Dead," muttered the stranger, "George dead, and never married—but—but I—it was said that he was going to marry Miss Garton, the old rector's daughter, I mean." His face was white under its bronze, his tone anxious.

"Well, sir," said the farmer's wife, "'twas always said he wanted her sorely, but she'd always favoured Mr. Harry, and they say she's been waiting for him ever since he went away, though 'tis well known that Mr. Harry had married some low person an' went away because the Squire found it out."

"It's a lie!" thundered the stranger suddenly. "A shameful lie: Harry Vernon never married at all." His face was distorted with passion, his thin hands clenched till the knuckles stood out white and sharp through the wrinkled skin. "And—and—Miss Garton?" he stammered in a broken voice, his face softening, "is she still alive—still waiting?"

"Yes, sir," said the farmer's wife, and her voice was wondrous gentle and kind, "she's still waiting in the little rose-covered cottage above Burford's farm—the same Ann Masters lived in after she left old Mrs. Vernon's service—I saw her as I came along."

"Thank you," said the stranger, and raising his hat with never-failing courtesy, he strode off along the road with a swift, firm tread, remarkable in a man of his years. The farmer's wife looked after him, with tears in her eyes.

"Well, I never did!" ejaculated her married sister. "Of all the extraordinary things; whoever is the old gentleman, Maria?"

But Farmer Burford's wife gave her no answer, and only watched the stranger's retreating form till a bend in the road hid it from view; then she drew her hand across her eyes, and jerking the reins on the pony's back, the cart rattled off again towards the town.

* * * *

The shadows were long in the water-meadows, and the cattle had stirred and were moving in a straggling line across the grass to the river. Jane, the servant, still slumbered on the back door step; the blackbird was still silent in the copse. In the little sitting-room the silence was only broken now and again by a stifled sound—half sigh, half sob—from Miss Rose, as she leaned against the escritoire with the withered flower and the miniature case clasped in her hands. Another bee had come and was humming about the lilies and roses at the window, but she did not hear. The wicket gate rattled and banged as someone opened it and let it fall to behind him; a footstep crunched the gravel outside, but she did not heed it. A shadow darkened the little room as the stranger stepped through the open window.

"Rosy, my little Rosy!" he cried hoarsely.

She turned swiftly.

"Harry, Harry," she sobbed, and was in his arms with his lips pressed to hers. And silence fell on the little room. . . .

"He told me it was himself you loved, Rosy, and begged me never to speak of it to you because you were so full of remorse. And, God forgive me, I believed him."

"He told me you were already married, Harry, but I never believed it of you."

"And you have waited for me all these years, my little Rosy—so long—so long."

"Ah, Harry, what are those years to me, what is my whole life, so that we are together again—at last."

* * * *

Sweet and passionate from the copse came the blackbird's song, filling the little room with throbbing melody.

And Time and Love stood hand in hand and watched these two white-haired lovers clasped in each other's arms.

A. M. HEWITT.

A Loveless Match.

By FLORENCE MASTERS.

"NURSE, may I come in? I want a chat with you."

"Dear heart alive, how you made me jump! I thought you were gone to the ball, my honey."

"No, I cried off at the last moment; I was in no humour for dancing. I had far rather be here with you, nurse."

"There, to think of it, Miss Tessa! and you so young too, and always so many partners waiting on you, it isn't natural, really it isn't. Now sit 'ee down in this chair and take a footstool, 'twill rest you. An' where have 'ee been to all this while, honey? These eyes haven't seen the like of you for three days and more."

"Three days. Is it so long, nurse?" And the speaker, a young girl of not more than eighteen years, sank with a sigh into the seat offered her, and gazed absently at the pink and blue, green and silver jets and spurts of flame which issued from the great log on the hearth.

Mrs. Meech, the person addressed as nurse, was in reality housekeeper at Sturton Towers, but long ago she had acted in the former capacity to Miss Tessa, as the young girl was called, when, having lost her own baby, she came to play a mother's part to Sir Alwynne Sturton's motherless daughter. It would almost seem that she had transferred her love from the dead child to the living, for her devotion to her mistress was extraordinary; but she was amply repaid both by Sir Alwynne and her nursling, who regarded her with affection and esteem, and when the time came that Miss Tessa passed into the hands of governesses, the girl was still faithful to her earliest friend and never let a day go by without spending a portion of it with the good old soul, to whom she was as the very apple of her eye.

The room in which these two now sat was a spacious chamber, the oak panellings darkened with the touch of time, the window lofty and mullioned; all round were presses and store cupboards; the fireplace was guiltless of grate, and on this particular night in question the wind roared in the vast chimney and rattled the casement noisily from time to time, as though demanding admittance. In spite of the facts that the curtains were close drawn and

that the heat of a large lamp spread a glow around them, the young girl shivered.

"You are cold, my sweet, let me get 'ee a shawl," said Mrs. Meech, who, for all that in giving her orders and lecturing the maids always used most correct English, was sure to lapse into the vernacular when her softer feelings were brought into play.

"No, thank you, this is quite warm," was the reply, as the girl touched lightly the sleeve of the long white woollen gown which half hid, half revealed her slender, shapely figure. She was very fair and rather fragile-looking, with dark blue eyes, and long pale-gold hair, which just now hung in one thick plait reaching far below her waist, and Mrs. Meech might well be pardoned for the looks of undisguised admiration she cast on her from time to time.

"Very well, dearie," she said, as she resumed the sewing she had put on one side for a few moments, whilst the storm without rattled and shrieked up the valley, and a few flakes of snow fell hissing on the burning embers, into which Tessa Sturton was still gazing absently.

"The old year dies hard, nurse," at length she remarked; "one could almost fancy that he was raving and weeping for very jealousy at the mere thought of everybody being on the tip-toe of eager expectancy to welcome his successor."

"Yes, it's a storm and no mistake! It do remind me of the night poor Mr. Bryan come by his end. But, there, why should an old woman like me seek to cloud your sweet face with her doleful recollections? The world is all before you, dear honey. As far as one can see, you may welcome in the new year right gladly. I guess it will be bringing you a sweetheart before it's many months with us."

"Nay, nurse; I love old friends best. I have been very happy in this that is nearly passed—happier than perhaps I shall ever be again."

"Why, what makes you say that, honey? Has something happened that you won't tell your old nurse about?"

"Something has happened, and I want to tell you all about it. Oh! Nursie, I am so miserable! You know Captain Sturton, my cousin?"

"Yes. You mean him as comes into the estates, failing your father's having a son?"

"He has proposed to my father for my hand, and the worst of it is my dear daddy wishes the marriage above all things."

"Well, honey, he might not make a bad husband for you, on the whole. He's handsome and well set-up, and rich. Why, come to think of it, you need never leave the Towers at all, maybe, if you wedded him."

"You too, nurse! Oh! this is dreadful! Papa's argument all over again." And the girl covered her face with her slender white fingers, and a couple of tears oozed from between them. Mrs. Meech got up and twined her arms lovingly round her treasure's neck.

"There's one thing you haven't told me, dearie," she said, in coaxing tones.

"What is that?" queried Tessa, taking her hands from her face and lifting a pair of dewy eyes to the homely features of the housekeeper.

"That you liked some one better," said her interlocutor, letting fly a chance shaft which struck home. Over the face that she loved the best on earth there crept a look half fear, half incredulity; then a tinge of pink gathered and spread under the delicate skin, whilst the eyes, but lately sad, brightened and glowed as though they had caught the reflection of some unseen star.

"How did you know, nurse? Why I thought it was my own secret, and you have found it out."

"It was only guess-work, darling. But why trouble about Captain Sturton, my angel, if you have already given your heart away?"

"Oh, hush! nurse, walls have ears. It is like this, you know: I am afraid my father would never consent; and Aleyn is so poor and proud, too, it would be years before he will be able to claim me. Besides, he has not said—he would not, he is so honourable. And my dear, dear daddy, for whom I would sacrifice most things, will, I know, fret and fume and plead my cousin's cause, and I shall grow unhappy because he is unhappy, and shall give in after all. Do you not think, nurse, that it would be better to settle the matter at once and say 'Yes?'"

"No, honey; I do not, decidedly. I know who's been coaching you up in all this worldly wisdom; it's that heartless, designing old woman, the captain's mother. She wants your own fortune,

added to Sturton Towers, for that precious son of hers ; but oh dear, Miss Tessa, for heaven's sake, do not let her or any one else persuade you into making a loveless match. Mr. Aleyn's a gentleman and a clever one, too, and is bound to make his way in time. Tell Sir Alwynne all about it and ask him to let you wait awhile "

Tessa shook her head sadly, then blushed again. "Aleyn—Mr. Maine has not spoken of love to me," she said ; "you forget that, nurse. Years ago, though, we promised to wait for each other, and I know very well he has not changed."

"Changed! How could he, my precious, if he once loved such a sweet flower as you? No, no, he's not o' that sort. I mind how I used to take you down to the rectory for the lessons in Latin his father used to give you. He was a good old man, too ; a pity that he died so poor, and Mr. Aleyn not fairly started in the world. But you bide a bit, miss ; he'll make some big hit, sure enough, and then the briefs or whatever you call'n will come tumbling in."

"Nurse, nurse, I wish I had your hopeful disposition. But I know perfectly well that I shall be weak enough to give way ; daddy will get his wish in the end, I am sure."

"Look here, Miss Tessa, dear, the bare thought of your going deliberately into such an awful abyss makes me fair tremble. It brings to my mind a very sad story, and a perfectly true one. You heard me mention your Uncle Bryan just now, and you have been told that he came to an untimely death just after he had come of age, but I think the facts of the case have been carefully kept from you—indeed to this day your father, Sir Alwynne, never alludes to them as the subject is too painful, for he was passionately attached to his elder brother, and the estates and title were to him but poor compensation for his loss. I was living at Sturton Marshall the time it happened—a mere slip of a girl of fifteen, and in the kitchen at Dr. Hobbs's house on the square. He were an old man with one only daughter, just as Sir Alwynne might be, and she was a bonny creature and no mistake ; not so comely as some I could name, but dark-eyed and merry, with a ripple of laughter or a dazzling smile for all she met. She could sing, too, gloriously, having a beautiful voice, which had been trained abroad, and her name was always a draw at the charity concerts given from time to time in the neighbour-

hood. 'Twas not so very long before it were noised about that Mr. Bryan, your uncle, were madly in love with her, and this report were followed by another that his father had set his face against the match. This was rather unexpected, for Dr. Hobbs was thought a deal of, and his wife a lady born and bred—one of the Newtons of Newton Regis in fact—and you may guess that he was none too pleased at the turn things were taking. I remember the last time those two poor creatures were really happy together; it was Christmas Eve, and we were busy in the schoolroom finishing off the wreaths and the texts for the church. I had gone over to help Miss Rhona, cutting and bunching up the holly and yew and feathery fir whilst she bound it into garlands for the pillars. I myself saw Mr. Bryan take her hand and kiss it because she had pricked her pretty plump fingers. Suddenly Bennett, the page, appeared at the door and beckoned me to him.

“‘Tell Miss Rhona cook says the pies is baked and claret mulled—and oh, my! shouldn’t I. like a taste, for it’s bitter cold to-night,’ says he.

“‘I’ll tell mistress all you say,’ I replied, and got the door pulled to in my face for my pains, and I could but go back to Miss Rhona and deliver the message, although I did not half like disturbing her, for she was deep in conversation with Mr. Bryan, and I knew they had met but seldom lately. Sir Francis, your grandfather, had threatened to disinherit Mr. Bryan if he continued courting Miss Rhona, that is to say of what went outside the entail, which last really was not enough to maintain the position and keep up the property; whilst Dr. Hobbs was furious, declaring that his daughter should never marry into a family who would not receive her with open arms, and hinting that she was about to be betrothed to another. Poor Miss Rhona, too, was almost as proud as her father, and so high-spirited that everyone feared she might, if tried too far, fall in with his wishes. But as I have said, on this night she was happy, having cast her sorrow behind her, and when I gave her cook’s message, she said, half laughingly:

“‘There, Bryan, you must come and taste them; you are sure of a hearty welcome to-night if on none other in the year. My father, as you well know, keeps open house on Christmas Eve, laying aside all feuds for the time being, if he have any. The

pies and claret are for the ringers, and I always dispense them ; it is such fun to see them gobble them down,' and a ripple of a laugh closed the sentence, but it died on her lips as she caught Mr. Bryan's reply.

" 'Not to-night, dear love,' I heard him say ; 'remember, I have passed my word to my father. There are only six short months to wait and then——' The rest of the sentence was lost, for by this time we were out in the open with the schoolhouse and the church with its clashing bells behind us, but I understood what Mr. Bryan meant. In six months he would be of age, with an income of his own, small 'tis true, but enough to keep a wife in a quiet way. Well, we made our way across the square, towards Miss Rhona's home, which was all ablaze with light, directly opposite. I did my best not to hear what they said, and lingered a little, but the wind blew odd words to me and I caught enough to know that my high-spirited mistress's blood was up, and when the lovers parted, as they very quickly did, I seemed to realize that something sad and fraught with evil had happened.

"Within two months from that Miss Rhona was married to a Mr. Balstone, a man who had made a very large fortune abroad and had bought 'The Turrets' down at Westmead—the house that is in ruins, you know, honey. The day of the wedding was a soft, fine February specimen, and Miss Rhona would have no carriages, and the procession across the square was a pretty sight, she carrying herself bravely till she got to the altar. Then she broke down completely, and laying her pretty head on the altar rails she sobbed so that every one in the church could hear her. The clergyman stopped and bending down asked her if she were there against her will. This rallied her and she shook her head, choked down her sobs and the service proceeded. But another trial awaited her when she came out, for at the church door stood Mr. Bryan, a mere ghost of his former self, with all the life gone from him, so to speak.

" 'Oh, Rhona, you might have waited,' he said, almost in a whisper, but she heard him. 'Only six short months,' he went on, like one in a dream. The bridegroom scowled, as well he might, then hurried Miss Rhona along, whilst she, deadly white and with an unutterably sad look in her tear-stained eyes, was about the sorriest bride I ever remember. She managed to get inside the door of her home and then she dropped senseless to

the ground. Well, I must hurry on with my tale, for 'tis getting late and you are tired, honey. After the wedding Mr. Bryan left home and Mr. and Mrs. Balstone were travelling abroad till within a fortnight of Mr. Bryan's birthday. All the rejoicings and festivities were postponed indefinitely, much to the disappointment of the folks at Sturton and Sturton Marshall, but Mr. Bryan had been ill, 'twas said, and no one was very surprised to hear it. Things went on pretty quietly for a while and then through the autumn and winter there were great doings at 'The Turrets'; guests by dozens, big shooting parties and dances no end, till all the country-side were envying Mrs. Balstone her riches; but they need not have done, for they never brought her any happiness. Just before Christmas, I was, by her own request, transferred to her establishment, and that is how I came to know all about that dreadful Christmas Eve. Mistress had not been well and doctor had prescribed a week's quiet and rest, and so she was not allowed to go to the big dinner party at her father's that night, though of course Mr. Balstone did. I was tired and got to bed early, and soon dropped asleep, in spite of the fact that the wind was howling and shrieking round the house same as it might be now. Suddenly I awoke at the sound of a woman's voice; a terrified cry of agony—a pistol shot, followed by another—I heard above the roaring of the storm. Then all was still.

"I dared not move, but lay trembling in my bed till one of my fellow-servants came and told me the truth. They had found poor Miss Rhona lying dead in the carriage drive, shot through the heart, whilst Mr. Bryan, though breath was just in him, would not live to see the sun rise, they said; and it was so, he died in the library, whither they had carried him, with the hand of my dead mistress locked fast in his own.

"The master had done the deed, all the servants said; mistress had been watching for him, a strange feeling of fear weighing her down, without knowing why. Then she had heard angry voices, rushed out and thrown herself between her lover and her husband, and received the bullet meant for Mr. Bryan.

"One of the servants, who was hurrying up to the spot, heard Mr. Balstone say, 'I vowed I would shoot you like a dog if ever I found you here,' and with that came the second shot; but by the time a lantern was got the murderer had disappeared.

"Before Mr. Bryan died he solemnly declared that Miss Rhona was quite unaware of his presence near the house, that he had merely come to keep a silent tryst with her for the last time on earth, that he intended leaving England never to return. Then Mr. Balstone, who it seemed was of an intensely jealous disposition, fell across him and recognized him, and the encounter brought about the tragedy that carried off two young creatures in the flower of their youth."

"Poor Uncle Bryan!" said Tessa, "how very sad for him! Was his murderer never punished, nurse?"

"He was never heard of again, honey. Many think he fell into an old marl pit that lies at the outer edge of one of his own coppices, but 'twas too deep to drag, and so his death's unproven to this day, and, strange to say, no one laid claim to his estate, the house has gone to ruins, and the money lies in Chancery," replied Mrs. Meech, who by this time was down on her knees before the fire trying to kindle a blaze, for in the excitement of story-telling she had let it burn itself nearly out.

"Meech, Meech! have you nothing better to do than to rake up sad tales and family secrets when my daughter comes to pass an hour with you?"

These words, uttered in a deep bass voice, caused Mrs. Meech for the second time that night to "nearly jump out of her skin," as she put it afterwards, but she recovered her manners so far as to rise and courtesy low to a tall man with iron-grey hair and imposing presence, who stood just within the doorway, with a look, half-anger, half-sadness, resting on his aristocratic features.

"Daddy!" exclaimed Tessa, rising from her chair, whilst her nurse muttered something about "Sir Alwynne, sir," but could get no further. The baronet kissed his daughter affectionately, and found her cheeks wet.

"What excuse can you offer for making Miss Tessa cry like this?" he asked somewhat sternly.

"None whatever, Sir Alwynne, sir, begging your pardon, only we had been discussing loveless marriages, and it brought the old tale to my mind. I am sorry, sir, if you are annoyed; I did not really mean any harm," and the good old soul looked so genuinely troubled that her master relented somewhat, especially when Tessa put in a word for her nurse.

"It was my fault, daddy dear; I ought not to have listened,

you know," and she smiled as she said it, and Sir Alwynne's face brightened under the influence of that smile.

But it was grave again ten minutes later, when she went into the library to bid him good-night.

"Tessa, child, I have been thinking that after all this marriage with your cousin may be distasteful to you. Did you suppose your father would force you into it against your will?"

"No, daddy, not that I feared persuasion."

"Does my dear girl love elsewhere, then?"

A nod of the head and a profusion of blushes told its own tale.

"I will not ask who to-night. Truth will out, I suppose."

And it did, perhaps through Mrs. Meech, who shall say? Anyhow, a week later Aleyn Maine received an invitation to stay at the Towers, and so kindly was he received by the baronet that before the visit was over he found courage to declare his love for Tessa, and was accepted by Sir Alwynne as his daughter's suitor, though that might never have come about had not his dead brother's face so persistently haunted him ever since the night Mrs. Meech had recalled the old sad story. But if it cost him an effort to forego his cherished plans, he was amply repaid in the radiant happiness of his dearly-loved child; and one lovely June morning they plighted their troth in the old church where Aleyn's father had used to minister.

Sir Alwynne is still living, but his nephew died many years ago, and so Tessa never left her old home and their boy is his grandfather's heir; but the old baronet laughingly tells him that he will need patience, for he intends to live to be a hundred, which Tessa declares she hopes he will do, and her husband echoes the wish, for he and his father-in-law are staunch friends. He says that he owes Sir Alwynne a debt of gratitude which he can never repay, for did he not give to his care and keeping the greatest treasure he possessed?